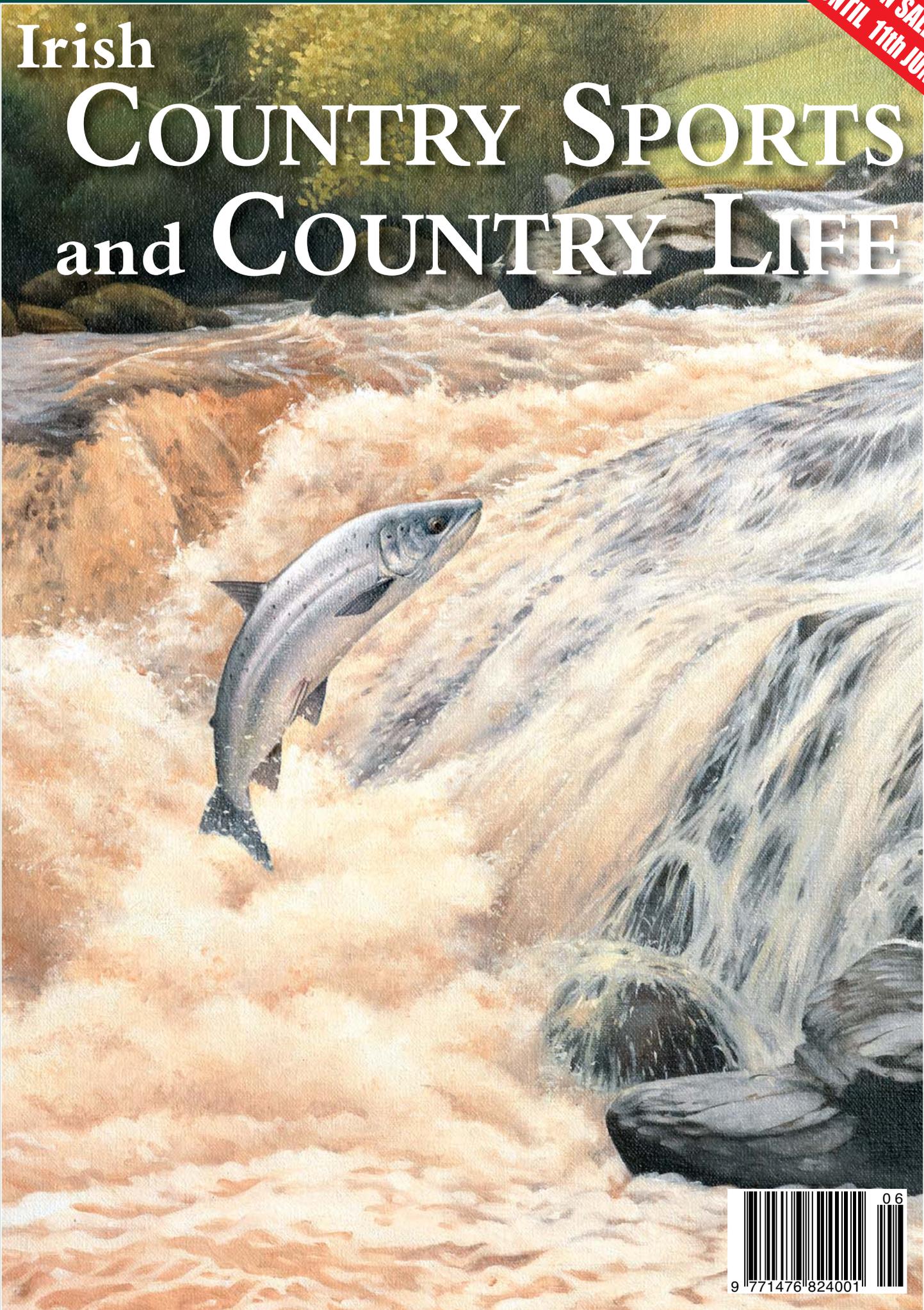


Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE

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www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com

The First of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland

BALLYWALTER GAME & COUNTRY LIVING FAIR



SATURDAY 5th & SUNDAY 6th May 2012

Ballywalter Estate, Co. Down 10.00 am – 6.00 pm

Further developments of all aspects of the first of the game fairs of the season are planned for Ballywalter Park. There will be an improved layout with a number of new attractions including the new Flavour Magazine Fine Food Festival in the courtyard. The lawns and house will host falconry and game displays, angling, vintage cars and carriages and a huge Georgian Military Village of costumed re-enactors from the Napoleonic to Victorian eras.

The tented village of trade stands will include an extended Angling Village as part of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland's 'Year of the Salmon & Trout' theme; game & fish cookery displays; sporting art; taxidermy; impressive displays of firearms, country clothing and shooting and gundog accessories and a huge range of other country lifestyle products. Dedicated children areas will feature not only a good range of amusements but a huge array of animals including ferrets, falcons, snakes and sea life.

Competitions and attractions include clay shooting with excellent prizes; retriever & spaniel tests; gundog scurry; terriers & lurchers including qualifiers for the Master Mc Grath Challenge and the Five Nations International Lurcher

Championships and the new Premier Event Catering Novice Lurcher racing event; air rifles; flycasting and fly tying; stick making; pugs and drummers; archery; displays of military vehicles and much, much more.

An action packed main arena programme from 10.00 – 6.00 each day featuring Keith Mathews the Dog Guru; Cochise Horses; cavalcades of horse drawn vehicles and vintage cars; the Victorian long netter; muzzle loaders Napoleonic War Fire Power; falconry; gundog demos; terrier & lurchers, horse and hounds and on the lake a superb punt gunning demonstration.

And all aspects of the fair including the County Down Past & Present Pavilion and many country sports facets will have a Georgian theme to reflect the history of the house. Step back in time to the Georgian period and a golden era for country pursuits and the great estates like Ballywalter. See costumed performers demonstrate shooting, archery, fly casting and gundog handling in the style of and with the equipment of the period. For further details and downloadable free programme see www.ballywaltergamefair.com or call 028 (from ROI 048) 44839167/44615416

The purchase of an adult ticket at Ballywalter for £10 will receive a voucher for £5 off admission to the Shanes Castle Fair & €10 off the admission price for the Birr Castle Fair. The purchase of a family ticket at Ballywalter will qualify for a £15 discount off the admission price of the Shanes Castle event and €20 off the price of the Birr Castle event. All with FREE parking and FREE programme.

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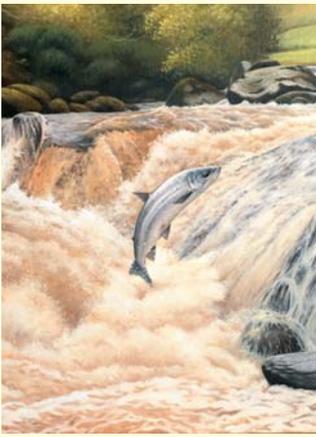
For further details see:
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With the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle, and the Irish Game & Country Fair at Birr Castle, one of the three GREAT GAME FAIRS of IRELAND. Supported by Irish Country sports and Country Life magazine (hard copy from newsagents or FREE to READ online www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com)

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Contents



Cover: From the Great Game Fairs of Ireland's 'Year of the Salmon' painting of 'Salmon on the Glendun River' by John Moore

3	Contents	92	Derek Fanning gives his views on the corrective use of the electric collar
4	ROI Comment		
5	Northern Comment	94	Country Chat with Billy Lewis
6	Countryside News	96	The Glennoo Phoenix
34	The Ballywalter Game & Country Living Fair	100	Plus Two's on poaching and other dark arts!
41	The Flavour Fine Food Festival	103	Curious Minds
44	Paul Pringle visits Donal McCloy's Guns Unlimited	105	Hunting Roundup with Tom Fulton
50	Joe Craig profiled by Winston Kelly	110	Art & Antiques Roundup
52	The IKC Retriever Championships	113	Dan Kinney looks at 'Conservation without Control'
61	The IGL Retriever Championships	115	AJ's Angst
68	The UGRC Open Stake at Moyola	117	A report on the Six Mile water Trust
71	The RSPB reports on their cooperation with farmers	120	FISSTA News & Views
74	NARGC report on the High Court Action	127	Andrew Griffiths shares with us 'The Story of George'
76	Frank Brophy goes wild boar hunting	130	Mark Patterson goes fishing in Poland
78	The Irish Fly Fishing & Game Shooting Museum	134	APGAI Ireland sets new standards
82	Poodles – a different type of hunting dog!	136	Johnny Woodlock looks at 'By Kill'
86	Liz Edgar goes on a 'wild goose chase'	139	Retriever Working Test Calendar
89	Liz Edgar shares a female's impressions of Drumbanagher	140	Derek Fanning is out with the beagles in Westmeath
		143	Dutch wildfowling and hare hunting

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Published in association with Ireland's country sports and country living web portal <http://www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com>

Country Sports and Country Life

Rol Comment

Game Fairs

Spring has arrived and with it the start of another game fair season. Our first fair of the year will be held on the 5th and 6th of May at Ballywalter Estate where you can enjoy all the usual attractions but with an even bigger angling village. This year's theme for our fairs is the 'Year of the Salmon and Trout,' following on from the very successful Year of the Dog and before that the Year of the Horse. With the support of FISSTA (Federation of Irish Salmon and Seatrout Anglers), APGAI Ireland and many other angling organisations we have brought together a wide range of fishing attractions including top tackle manufacturers and dealers. And there will be expert casting demonstrations, fly tying and game and fish cookery to complement the boats, tackle valuations, sporting hotels and taxidermy.

To mark the 'Year of the Salmon and Trout,' we have commissioned an iconic painting by artist John Moore showing salmon on the Glendun River, which carries a strong conservation message as this river has been badly affected by netting. And we are putting something back too as this painting and limited edition prints will be sold with ALL proceeds going to help young anglers through the good offices of FISSTA.

The Irish Game Fair will follow on July 7th and 8th at Shane's Castle, Antrim and The Irish Game and Country Fair at Birr Castle in Co. Offaly on August 25th and 26th so make sure the dates are in your diary - simply unmissable.

All of our fairs, Ballywalter, Shane's Castle and Birr will have the biggest angling villages at any fair in Ireland this year and we expect to attract crowds by the thousand and breaking the records for attendance yet again.

It is an ideal opportunity for the trade to showcase their products to an expected footfall of 80,000.

We are organising a stunning range of competitions with the biggest prize fund of any fair and something for everyone both young and not so young. Whether you hunt,



shoot, fish or just enjoy being in the countryside you will have a great day out and with special rates for visitors and exhibitors. It will be better value than ever for the whole family.

New Fishing Season

The salmon and trout season has opened on many waters and many of you will soon be taking to your boats in pursuit of some of the best game fishing in the world. Please remember that our waters can be dangerous and make sure that all your equipment is in good order. Many older anglers are still reluctant to wear their life jackets and think they will have time to pull it on when disaster strikes. Sadly, that is rarely the case and I have seen a number of fatalities where there was a life jacket in the

boat but there was no time to put it on. Remember that we all put ourselves into harm's way on occasions but there's no point in taking the unnecessary chances.

Firearms

Most of you will be aware of the long running battle over the issue, or rather the non-issue, of some firearms licences which recently ended up in the High Court in Dublin and that is dealt with in greater detail elsewhere in this magazine.

Congratulations to the NARGC on a great victory in the High Court, which will hopefully lead to a centralised, efficient, effective, and above all sensible, licensing system at long last. It has taken considerable courage to reach this stage and while shooting organisations have pressed the Department of Justice for many years to have a realistic system of firearms licensing, the NARGC should be saluted for this success. It has proved the value of persistence and not being deflected by the possible financial costs of taking on the authorities. The help, both moral and financial, of all shooters is vital in such actions and shows what can be done.

Philip Lawton
ROI Editor

Country Sports and Country Life

Comment

The Republic Of Ireland's firearms licensing debacle

Many of our readers have been following the recent court proceedings regarding firearms licensing procedures in the Republic of Ireland and the outcome concerning the test cases in the High Court. Put simply the Garda got a caning. Because of the coverage and the quite extraordinary intervention of Judge Hedigan, we have been inundated with comment and enquiries from our readers on these matters. What is being done to make sure that a better system is put in place, etc?

We are carrying a hard hitting piece by Des Crofton, NARGC on the fiasco that saw the Court find for the test cases which challenged the Garda's licensing system but I wanted to see why the whole system was tarnished. Was the ROI a hotbed of crime involving licensed weapons perhaps that called for some sort of 'different' approach?

To find out I needed some basic information so I asked the Garda about the number of crimes involving the use of unlicensed weapons and licensed weapons. They said that answers were not readily available and to find out would be a disproportionate use of garda resources. But they gave me figures I had not requested for firearms stolen and recovered. I got the feeling I was starting the old quango game of pushing water uphill with a blade of grass. I had thought that figures like this would be easy to come by, not least to help inform their own thinking on firearms licensing. Brainwave - surely crime statistics would be published in the Commissioner's Report or made available to the Dail and therefore available publicly. Apparently not, or not in the way that I had requested. Mind you, they suggested I could always try a Freedom of Information request. Or, I could get a question asked in the Dail. Then they advised me to try the CSO. I was starting to glaze over.

I had noticed Minister Shatter said: "The Commissioner is addressing as a matter of urgency the whole process of firearms licensing and the administrative functions associated with it in the light of the outcome of those Court proceedings.... the Commissioner has indicated that he shares the concern expressed by the Judge in the case about the alteration of documents after proceedings had commenced and, in the first instance, has sought an explanation as to the circumstances in which this occurred."

So I asked the Garda if this review was underway and when was it due for completion. I was keen to know if they planned to discuss the cause of the problems, which created so many legal challenges, with the National Association of Regional Game Councils, with a view to establishing structures which would help to ensure legal challenges would not be necessary in the future. The Court proceedings showed that the Garda were at fault, yet the review was being handled internally, so was it a case of the Garda effectively reporting on themselves? So I asked them if the process was therefore a waste of time and



public funds as had been suggested?

And here is what they said: "We are not in a position at this time to comment on your query." Given their abysmal record on firearms licensing and the way that my attempts to get answers to run of the mill statistics met a stone wall, I wasn't surprised.

When the story broke, I could scarcely believe how the firearms licensing situation had become such a fiasco. I cling to the hope that the Commissioner's review will put matters right. Without the guts and determination of the NARGC taking on the Garda in the High Court, the whole mess would still be in existence. We hope to be able to bring you the findings of the review in due course.

The position in Northern Ireland

The Department of Justice is planning to issue a public consultation document later this year - they couldn't confirm a date - on proposals to vary the firearms licensing fees to meet the Managing Public Money guidance on fees, charges and levies and on a limited number of proposals for miscellaneous amendments to the legislation. Work to finalise the consultation document is ongoing. The miscellaneous amendments will include proposals to: extend the provisions in Section 103 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 concerning variation of firearms certificates; review the age restriction on young shooters; and change the requirements for applications for a European Firearms Pass.

The Department has no plans to change the validity period of a firearm licence.

Now here is an interesting thing: the Department said that in preparing the document there have been some discussions with local stakeholders such as PSNI, Northern Ireland Firearms Dealers' Association and Northern Ireland Firearms Controls Liaison Committee and, I believe, some others. What form these discussions took I do not know, as I haven't seen anything coming from our representative bodies. Have any readers been asked for their views on what should be put to the Department? Asking around, the answer seems to be 'no.'

The purpose of the public consultation will be to ensure that anyone who has an interest will have an opportunity to contribute their views, so just let's wait and see what is in the pipeline. A huge rise in fees for a firearms licence perhaps? Surely not. If the discussions did include the representative bodies, surely that daunting prospect would have been fought against tooth and nail and we would have heard about it.

Wouldn't we?

And finally, an apology to our readers as we have to hold over reports on the IKC Spaniel Championships and the UK Cocker Championship until the Summer Edition.

Paul Pringle
Northern Editor

COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

The Gundog of the Year organised by the Northern Ireland Gundog Field and Show Society and sponsored by Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine and Feedwell.

The NIGFSS Gundog of the Year competition was held at the Sixmile Leisure Centre, Ballyclare on the 28th January. As usual Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine and Feedwell were the sponsors. There was an excellent entry of 63 dogs, all previously qualifying at various shows throughout the country.

The judge for the event was Chris Atkinson (Segantii) from England, an Irish Setter specialist but gives CCs in 15 gundog breeds under KC rules.



Gundog of the Year was Wendy Fleming's Pointer, Irish Sh Ch Hookwood Dark Raven in Glenariff, Jun Ch, CJW & CW '10 who won the same award last year and was Gundog Puppy of the Year in 2009.

Reserve Gundog of the Year was Alec Douglas' Labrador Retriever, Talard Columbia.

Feedwell



Gundog Pup of the Year winner was Alec Douglas Labrador Retriever, Ramsayville Raise The Anchor at Talard.

Emma, Frank & Bette Archibald's Golden Retriever, Abinvale The Aviator, was runner up.



Gundog Veteran: Winner McKinley's Welsh Springer Runner up Emma Archibald's Golden retriever
Photos : Joyce Crawford-Manton

The 'Year of the Dog' hasn't gone away!

Although the focus of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland has moved to Salmon & Trout this year.

We still are carrying forward many of the innovative competitions and attractions from last year's theme of 'The Year of the Dog' which settled once and for all which fairs in Ireland have the largest gundog, terrier & lurcher (and indeed canine) sections.

In 2012 we have taken steps to further enhance this reputation, with a greater array of competitions and an increased prize fund.

And, as many of you know, this magazine is responsible for co-ordinating the Retriever Working Test Calendar and as a couple of clubs have the unenviable dates of the weeks before our fairs at

Shanes and Ballywalter we thought we would give retriever handlers the incentive to support these club's tests AND the game fairs at Ballywalter and Shanes Castle, by giving each entrant to these tests a FREE ticket to the respective game fairs which follow.

The Ulster Golden Retriever Club have their test at Shanes Castle on the 28th April. The Open test is the qualifying test for the NI team for the international gundog test at the Shanes Castle Game Fair. All entrants to the test on the 28th April will receive a FREE ticket to the Ballywalter Fair on the 5th & 6th May.

The Labrador Club of NI have their test at Clondeboye on the 30th June. All entrants to this fair will receive a FREE ticket to the Shanes Castle Fair on the 7th & 8th July.

Top Winning Dogs Thrive on **Feedwell**

Dogs such as those owned by Finbar O'Sullivan:



Finbar's dog IR. FTCH Rommels Mystery is fed on Feedwell products and is the winner of 5 open stakes under the German Pointer Club of Ireland. He was Irish kennel Club HPR dog of the year 2010 and is at stud to approved bitches. Enquiries to Finbar Tel 0851742256 (00353 outside ROI)

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These are just some of the owners of all types of dogs who use Feedwell regularly and express their satisfaction with well formulated products available at sensible prices.

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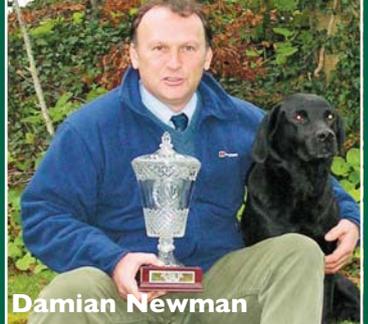
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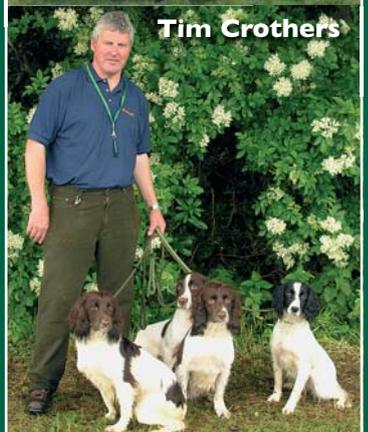
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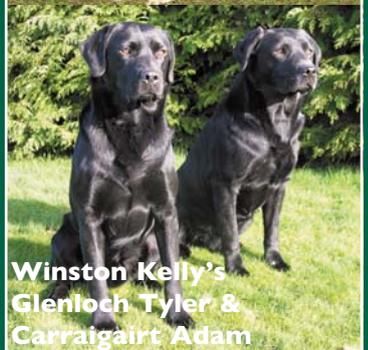
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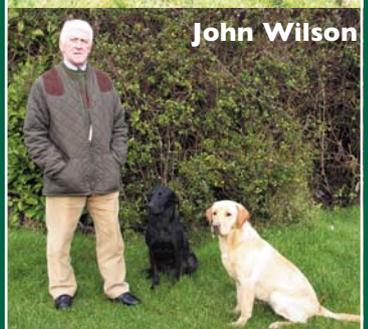
Alan Rountree



Tim Crothers



Winston Kelly's
Glenloch Tyler &
Carraigairt Adam



John Wilson

Gamekeeping and Land Management Course

Back in 2007 the College of Agriculture Food & Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) in partnership with the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT) and the RSPB initiated the Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Project. The project aimed to develop, implement and promote sustainable environmental management practices on the Greenmount Hill Farm at Glenwherry to meet the needs of the wide range of habitats in line with sustainable livestock production. Targets were set for improvement in upland habitat condition and increasing the numbers of red grouse, a threatened species in Northern Ireland.

The knowledge and experience gained in achieving these targets means that CAFRE is now in a position to develop a course in Gamekeeping and Land Management subject to local support and sufficient interest from land owners, land managers and potential trainees.

It is envisaged that the course will focus initially on upland and moorland management for red grouse. However, we are open to ideas and suggestions that will make the course as relevant as possible to employers and students.

If you are a land manager, potential employer, student or interested individual and would like to register your interest or have a query please call Margaret McLarnon at 028 9442 6728.



CAFREs proposed Gamekeeping and Upland Management Course will benefit threatened species such as the red grouse.

RSPB assures farmers LAMB IS NOT ON THE MENU FOR RED KITES

Kites are scavengers, preferring to dine on worms, scraps and mice, so lambs are safe and with the lambing season in full swing, the RSPB is reassuring farmers that red kites do not pose any threat to lambs. These spectacular birds are once again making themselves at home in Northern Ireland after an absence of 200 years.

"Red kites are chiefly scavengers," says Adam McClure, RSPB Red Kite Officer. "Kites do not hunt mobile prey, but prefer to feed on meat scraps, earthworms, carcasses, frogs and the occasional mouse or rat. These birds of prey lack the power, strength and speed to take anything larger than a young rabbit, never mind a lamb."

Red kites were reintroduced to Northern Ireland over a three year period between 2008-10, in a project run by RSPB NI in partnership with the Welsh Kite Trust and the Golden Eagle Trust in the Republic of Ireland. The birds have now begun to breed successfully and there are currently thought to be 70-80 red kites in Northern Ireland.

Feeders not hunters

Since the start of the reintroduction programme, when red kites were released near Castlewellan, the RSPB has been working closely with Co. Down farmers. As a result, local people are confident that red kites do not threaten livestock. The birds are now a source of pride. As red kites expand their territory and begin to range far and wide, the RSPB is spreading this message further afield too. "If red kites are new in an area, local farmers may not be used to seeing this large russet bird in their skies, but they need to know there is no need to worry during lambing season," says Adam McClure. "Appearances may be deceiving, but the red kite is actually a bit of a wimp. These birds may look amazing wheeling high above, but they do not have the size, power or the agility to take prey on the move. Kites can be lazy too, if they can get a meal without killing, so much the better."

More details about identifying red kites, their territory and feeding habits can be found in a new comprehensive 8-page guide. Northern Ireland Red Kites is available now, free from the RSPB. To get a copy, and if you have any questions, please contact 02890 491547 or email redkiteni@rspb.org.uk.

Wildhunter Range at the Great Game Fairs of Ireland

As you can see from the Wildhunter advert elsewhere in the magazine, the company has a fabulous range of products for all country sports available from their website or stockists. These include top quality clothing, decoying equipment, calls and lamps.



Wildhunter will be exhibiting many new products at the Ballywalter, Shanes Castle and Birr Castle Game Fairs that will be available for the 2012 season. These products have not been released yet so country sports enthusiasts will have to wait until the shows to see them.

"WATCH THIS SPACE," for news and reviews of them over the next year. They will also have many end of line products for sale at bargain prices. All of Wildhunters new products will be available from all good Gun Shops in both the North and South.

The team from Wildhunter look forward to seeing you all on our stands at the three shows.

Contact: Wildhunter, Golden Island, Athlone, Westmeath Tel 00353 (0)90 6470344

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Sporting

COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

SWAROVSKI OPTIK presents two new products for the upcoming SHOT Show

With the latest generation of its tried-and-tested Z6 rifle scope and the new EL 32 SWAROVISION hunting binoculars, SWAROVSKI OPTIK is adding two new, technically and optically perfect hunting companions, which are exceptionally easy to use. Both products feature the latest developments from the Tyrol-based leading manufacturer.



The new Z6 rifle scope will save you time and energy

Technical perfection with a new elegant style

The scope's slimmer design is the feature that will immediately strike you, which is now in keeping with all current hunting weapons. The narrower, low illumination unit also means that you can use the illuminated reticle in a specific, reliable manner. Thanks to SWAROLIGHT technology, the rifle scope uses a tilt sensor to detect independently whether the weapon is in a shooting position. When the weapon is picked up, the illuminated reticle is ready for use very quickly, allowing the marksman to concentrate fully on the hunt. This saves time and energy. The improved electronics also increase the battery life. New features have also been added to the ballistic and parallax turrets to make using the scope more intuitive when hunting.

Exceptional optics for the crucial moment

Razor-sharp optics offer excellent edge-to-edge sharpness with exceptional comfort, allowing rapid target acquisition during flush hunting. The high-contrast image shows its benefits when hunting in poor lighting conditions. The high-magnification models (higher than 15x) also have HD optics to ensure an accurate shot over long distances. The SWAROCLEAN coating applied for the first time to the

SWAROVSKI OPTIK rifle scopes makes it easier to clean water marks, insect repellent, gun oil or tree resin, thanks to its special non-stick characteristics.

EL 32 SWAROVISION: The new hunting binoculars from SWAROVSKI OPTIK

The size and weight of the binoculars are crucial factors particularly for hunters. The EL 32 is compact and light and providing a crystal-clear view, to make out the smallest details in clear



EL32 Compact with an uncompromising crystal clear view

and sharp focus, even in poor viewing conditions. The EL 32 SWAROVISION is compact with uncompromising SWAROVISION technology. At 580 grams they are even lighter than the previous model.

Top marks for optics and luminosity

The EL 32 SWAROVISION binoculars are synonymous with crystal-clear image quality.

Maximum comfort for all users

The EL 32 SWAROVISION binoculars offer an impressive unrestricted wide-angle field of view of 141 m at 8x magnification and 120 m at 10x magnification. Thanks to the larger exit pupil distance typical of this range of binoculars, spectacle wearers can also fully enjoy the crystal-clear image quality. For further details visit www.swarovskioptik.com

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We invite you to treat yourself or a friend to a subscription to Ireland's premier Countrysports magazine Irish Countrysports and Country Life. We like to add additional value to our subscriptions and are delighted to offer a FREE ticket to EITHER Shanes Castle or Birr Fairs (worth £10 or €15) plus a year's subscription to the magazine for just £15/€20.

Please enrol me as a subscriber to Countrysports and Country Life at the cost of £15/ €20 to include a free ticket to EITHER the Shanes Castle Fair (7th & 8th July 2012) or the Birr Fair (25th & 26th August 2012). I enclose my Cheque/International money order made out to Countrysports and Country Life.

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Signature:..... Subscription to start with: Vol No Ticket to Shanes or Birr please specify

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**And DON'T forget to keep visiting Ireland's major countrysports internet resources
www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com www.greatgamefairsofireland.com**

WHEN SECONDS ARE CRUCIAL

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Dress to impress with Jack Murphy's Fashion in the Field

If you're planning on being out and about this season you'll want to look the part as well as feel great. Look no further than Jack Murphy's irresistibly Irish contemporary country clothing for men and women.

The question of "what to wear?" can pose a dilemma. Whether you're at the CLA Game Fair, clay shooting for charity or walking your dog you'll want to dress for comfort. The Irish and British weather can serve up four seasons in a day so layers are a must. Attending a lunch can add to the quandary – you now need to be chic too. Jack Murphy has the answer; with its contemporary twist on traditional styles it brings fashion to function in country clothing, inspired by the countryside.



Cary Ladies Wax Jacket in Ultramarine & Rachel Ladies' Shirt in Spring Check.



Infused with floral prints in a spring pallet the Jack Murphy ladies' collection is unashamedly feminine, romantic and nostalgic.



Live and Love the Countryside

The Jack Murphy Men's Collection can only be described as classic debonair with a contemporary twist. Traditional earthy tones juxtapose with strong colours in a striking, sporty and classically smart range for the stylish country gent or the man about town on a weekend away.

With its elegant wax styles, classic, contemporary country quilts, shirts, polo and rugby tops, lightweight jackets, and a timelessly elegant Heritage Range Jack Murphy gives you everything for practically smart layering and leaves you spoilt for choice.

Thoughtfully designed Jack Murphy accessories complement the main collection providing the all-important finishing touches for fashionable form in any field.

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Lyme disease risk much greater than previous estimates suggest

Ticks infected with the bacteria that cause Lyme disease may be considerably more prevalent in the UK than recent estimates indicate, according to new research from the University of Bristol that used pet dogs as 'sentinels' for human disease risk. Transmitted by ticks, Lyme disease is a debilitating chronic infection which affects a number of animals including humans and dogs.

It is caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Clinical signs in humans include a characteristic circular red rash that spreads from the site of the tick bite, followed by a flu-like condition. In dogs, the symptoms can be much more vague and difficult to diagnose. If untreated, the disease progresses to neurological problems and arthritis; chronic forms of the disease can last for many years. While only occasionally affecting humans, reported cases in the UK are thought to have increased more than fourfold since the beginning of the century - from 0.38 per 100,000 in 2000 to 1.79 per 100,000 in 2009. In 2010 there were 953 reported cases in England and Wales but the level of underreporting is likely to be considerable.

To obtain a clearer picture of the prevalence of infected ticks, Faith Smith of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences and colleagues recruited vets across England, Scotland and Wales to examine dogs selected at random as they visited veterinary practices. Since pet

dogs largely share the same environment and visit the same outdoor areas as their owners, exposure to infected ticks in dogs is likely to provide an index for corresponding risks to humans. Of 3,534 dogs inspected between March and October 2009, 14.9 per cent had ticks. Of the samples that could be tested, 17 were positive for the *Borrelia* bacteria. Hence, 2.3 per cent of ticks were infected. The expected prevalence of infected ticks on dogs is 0.5 per cent, or 481 infected ticks per 100,000 dogs. This suggests that the prevalence of *Borrelia* in the UK tick population is considerably higher than previously thought.

Faith Smith said: "Lyme disease appears to be a rapidly growing problem in the UK with important health and economic impacts in terms of loss of working hours and potential decrease in tourism to tick hotspots. Without considerably better surveillance and routine diagnostic testing, Lyme disease is only likely to become more prevalent. In particular, future warmer winters might well extend the period over which ticks are active seasonally, while growing wild reservoir host populations, such as deer, will allow the tick population to expand."

The study was published in the journal *Comparative Immunology, Microbiology and Infectious Diseases*.



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Subordinate Legislation in Northern Ireland

Countryside Alliance Ireland continues to be at the forefront and leads the way in campaigning for fair legislation in Northern Ireland in respect of legitimate country sports activities. In 2011, two Acts were passed which have direct bearing for us and we responded to the consultations on the proposed subordinate legislation concerning tail docking for working dogs (Welfare of Animals Act) and the use of snares in Northern Ireland (Wildlife and Natural Environment Act). The proposed subordinate legislation is due for publication shortly and we shall remain vigilant to ensure our members' interests continue to be best served.

CAI had meetings with Sinn Féin and DUP on Monday 13 February to discuss a number of important issues. These included the subordinate legislation regarding tail docking, the use of snares, the forthcoming firearms consultation and the dog breeding establishment's regulations.

Republic of Ireland Firearms Legislation – All We Ask for is Fair Play

Countryside Alliance Ireland (CAI) has welcomed the decision in the high court to allow all those persons who have had their restricted firearm applications refused, the opportunity to re apply. Chief Executive, Lyall Plant said: "It has been abundantly clear since the introduction of the revised legislation that target shooters have not had their applications processed in the correct manner. We have continually stressed the importance to ensure that the firearms licensing procedures should not make it impossible for legitimate practising target shooters, who are fully paid up members of an authorised club and who fulfil all the criteria both personally and with regard to security arrangements, to re-licence their equipment.

It has long been our belief, of the importance for having a centralised firearms licensing unit within the Garda structure. The establishment of such a unit would remove the variation in processing and decision making and provide consistency throughout the whole process. We shall continue to monitor the situation and if members wish to contact us with their individual queries or concerns we are more than happy to assist." Countryside Alliance Ireland is also pleased to have been able to offer financial support to the National Association of Sporting Rifle and Pistol Clubs over this period of firearms licensing uncertainty.

Clonmel Coursing Festival 2012

The annual National Coursing Festival was once again held in Clonmel at the end of January. Countryside Alliance Ireland were again, delighted to have a stand at Powerstown Park which this year



Liam Murphy, Greyhound & Pet World presents the Breeders Trophy to Orlaith Farrelly and Kathleen Murphy, Greyhound & Pet World presents the Owners Trophy to Brendan Farrelly following the victory of Dale Roisin in the 2012 Greyhound & Pet World Irish Coursing Oaks. Also in photo are supporters of the winning connections from Westmeath, DJ Histon CEO ICC, Brian Divilly President ICC and Darren Ryan, Mayor Of Clonmel. Photo: Imelda Grauer

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE IRELAND

Love the countryside

was manned by first time attendees David and Jenny.

The weather looked a little dubious at the start of the week but this did not deter the spectators who turned out to see the first of the week's heats. The morning and afternoon activities consisted of the first round for the Greyhound and Pet World Oaks and the Boylesports.com Derby which reduced the 64 dogs in each down to 32 for the next day. Another large crowd turned out for Tuesday's coursing regardless of the consistent drizzle that hovered over Powerstown.

Coursing was to a high standard and kept the spectators enthralled throughout. The final day of the festival dawned with a bright, crisp morning. Temperatures were noticeably low at the start of the day but once the sun rose a bit higher it was sunny and pleasant. As expected, crowds were at their biggest to view the final three rounds. Once again, the coursing proved highly competitive and exciting for the many spectators and as with the day before, the two team choices met in one of the Oak's quarter finals.

Over the three days, it has been estimated that 50,000 supporters attended the festival. This creates huge revenue for the town and injects a reported €15million into the Irish economy. It is an event on a grand scale and one that should be nurtured and celebrated.

It has been reported the team had a bet each in the Oaks and Derby and both were extremely pleased to see their choices going through to Tuesday's heats, with Jenny's choice going on to round three of the Derby. Beginners luck has been suggested and subsequently denied by them both!



John Boyle, Boylesports presents the Owners Trophy to members of the Mel Syndicate from Glin in Co Limerick following the victory of Go Home Hare in the 2012 Boylesports.com Irish Coursing Derby. Brian Divilly, President of the Irish Coursing Club presents the Breeders Trophy to Brian Kennedy, Clara, Co Kilkenny. Also in photo are DJ Histon, CEO ICC and in front with Go Home Hare is trainer Dessie Kerrigan from Derry. Photo: Imelda Grauer

The 2012 Boylesports.com Derby winner was 'Go Home Hare' and 'Dale Roisin' was victorious in the Pet World Oaks.

There was truly an electric atmosphere throughout the week in Powerstown Park, and the facilities and staff ensured an enjoyable time was had by all. It is therefore necessary to say congratulations to DJ Histon, the Irish Coursing Club, and all involved, for another very successful National Coursing Festival.

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Ireland's Rural Champions

Ireland's rural Champions of 2011 have been revealed in the Countryside Alliance Awards. These celebrate the characters, skills, traditions and enterprise of the countryside through the people who work so hard to make it tick. The Awards are public-nomination led, meaning each business is put forward by a supportive customer. Judging of a shortlist of finalists has now taken place and a winner declared in each category.

Lyll Plant, Chief Executive of Countryside Alliance Ireland, commented, "Countryside Alliance Ireland is very proud to be able to acknowledge and celebrate some of Ireland's great characters and the wonderful produce that is generated here. The winners of these Awards have been nominated by their local community and should therefore realise the recognition that their hard work is receiving. We hope each winner thoroughly enjoys the ceremony in London and continues to provide the valuable service to both rural and urban communities that they currently do. I would also like to thank all those who took part in the Awards and submitted nominations, as these Awards would not be possible without them."

'Rural Oscars' 2011 Irish Winners Announced

The regional winners from the nominations received throughout Ireland have been announced. Ireland's winners for 2011 are:

Food category champion: Clogher Valley Meats, Clogher, County Tyrone

This is a family run business offering a butcher and baker all in one. The staff has a strong knowledge of everything sold, especially the locally reared meats for which Clogher Valley Meats is so famous.

The Meehan family is central to Clogher, helping to organise many local events and fundraisers. Kieran is on the local traders group within the town and is extremely motivated by local life, saying his motto is "My community needs me as much as I need my community."

Village Shop/Post Office category champion: Muckamore Post Office, Antrim, County Antrim.

Islandbawn Stores are an institution in the area; it is a village shop, post office, petrol station and DIY supplier all rolled into one. The Kirkpatrick family has worked exceptionally hard over many years to build this business into what it is today; this shop is everything the category is about and embodies the ethos of the Awards.

Enterprise category champion: The Irish Fly Fishing and Game shooting Museum, Attanagh, County Laois

Walter Phelan's rural museum, which has been funded mainly by Walter himself, is a true labour of love containing his extensive collection of fishing, shooting and trapping exhibits, alongside photographs, magazines, taxidermy and other curiosities from sporting history in Ireland. Walter's pure aim, he says, is "to pass on the great joy I get when I am out in the open air hunting, fishing and shooting."

Butcher category champion: Nolan's of Kilcullen, Kilcullen, County Kildare

Nolan's of Kilcullen is a real beacon of excellence. James Nolan is the fourth generation to own the shop in Kilcullen and his energy and ideas are inspiring to both the public and his staff. The produce is of an excellent standard and James and his wife Emma are justly proud of the quality and traceability of everything sold on the shop floor, whether from their own farm or from local farmers.

Highly Commended: J Muldrew & Son, Markethill, County Armagh
Muldrew's really embody the community retail ethos these awards wish to preserve. Great community spirit is on display here from everyone on the team and Muldrew's is a popular centre of the community.

Highly Commended: Moate Meats, Moate, County Westmeath,
Moate Meats have been trading since 1913 and it is clear this is an essential part of the community. The team are justly proud that they are still slaughtering much of the shop's produce, ensuring total traceability and high animal welfare standards.



Michael Martin received the Rural Hero Award

Rural Hero: Michael Martin has been selected as Ireland's Rural Hero. Michael has been instrumental, along with others, in setting up the Six Mile Water Trust. The Trust represents a wide range of people including local residents' groups, RSPB, environmental groups and water sport enthusiasts.

Michael is also involved in an education programme with local schools. This busy man is entirely motivated by a love of our waterways and a desire to secure their health and future, therefore Countryside Alliance Ireland agrees this makes him a true hero.

Jim Shannon MP steps up to the mark for salmon

Jim Shannon, well known for his support for shooting and indeed all country sports at the Assembly and now Westminster, has stepped forward to support FISSTA.

Responding to FISSTA, he made known his opposition to the issue of North Coast salmon net licences known to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister Caral Ni Chuilin MLA and expressed his concern regarding the decline in salmon numbers returning to our rivers to spawn.

The Minister confirmed to Mr Shannon that her officials had written to individual stakeholders and representative bodies asking for support for a range of voluntary conservation measure for the 2012 fishing season.

She also said that she was considering powers under the Fisheries Act to introduce a range of salmon conservation measures in respect of commercial fishing and recreational angling.



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Working dogs often get scratches on the ears and tails from brambles or they start to constantly scratch, nibble, bite and lick themselves. It may just be the paws or it may be the whole body that is itchy. The constant scratching damages the skin – the hair may become stained with constant licking, or bald patches develop. The skin may become red and hot, with open sores caused by the scratching, or the skin may just look very dry and flaky. Sore, itchy, irritated skin can make a dog constantly lick at the same spot and this eventually causes a sore to develop which can become granulated. The answer is the highly effective Camrosa Ointment.

Camrosa Ointment soothes itchy, irritated, dry skin, and helps promote the natural healing of superficial injuries, cracks, sores and callused skin. It aids hair regrowth and maintains supple skin. Camrosa can also be applied as a protective barrier to the paws, legs, bellies, ears, and tails before the dog works. As it is truly water repellent and will stay in place it acts as a barrier to protect the skin from the effects of the environment, including water, and helps to stop brambles snagging in the coat and scratching the skin, especially for Spaniels.

The shampoo, with its conditioning properties, is highly concentrated, lasts a long time even with frequent use and is in itself very soothing on hot, itchy skin. It was especially formulated for animals with a sensitive skin and for use in conjunction with Camrosa Ointment. As it is so mild it can be used as often as is necessary and it really does leave the coat clean and glossy.

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Twitter's Town Gun reports on 'Pie Wars'

Britain looked set to relive the War of the Roses again – but this time over the state of the nation's pies. Gentle banter on Twitter about who makes the country's finest pie rapidly escalated in to something more serious. With local honour at stake the hash-tag #pieWars appeared and battle lines were drawn. "What started as a skirmish between Lancashire and Yorkshire quickly escalated in to a full-blown inter-county conflict and #pieWars was the inevitable outcome," said blogger Town Gun. He admits to starting hostilities by claiming that Crosby bakers Satterthwaite's were: "The indisputable kings of the pork pie."

That was too much for proud Yorkshireman Jamie Horner of Perdix Game Feed who retorted that the true claim to the crown lay with Turner's. "It could have stayed as a modern-day take on the War of the Roses," said Town Gun, "but Twitter doesn't work like that and all manner of ne'er-do-wells stuck their oars in and before we knew it all hell had broken loose."

And, it seems, there are no cross-county alliances at play - it was every (pie) man for himself. Some rules of combat were quickly drawn up to bring order to proceedings. As Town Gun said: "If you don't love your local pie man enough to have nominated him by then well, frankly, you need to move to somewhere better."

Plans for a 'taste-off' followed and Tweepers who nominated a pie maker will be invited to attend with two samples of their pie-man's artistry. A judging panel of four will assess each pie against a set of criteria, including taste, presentation, structure, meat content, pastry, and performance when hot and cold. The judges have reserved the right to wash down each mouthful with some local ale 'as a palette cleanser.' Watch this space for further updates!

Editor's Note: Of course whatever the outcome of the pie wars, we have our very own winner at the Great Game Fairs of Ireland - Peter Gott of Sillfield Farm in the NW of England. With queues for Peter's fine fare the proverbial 'mile long,' and with the sudden outbreak of 'pie wars' our advice is to get down to Peter's stand early at the Fair for some of the best game pies - ever!



The legendary Peter Gott will be attending the Great Game Fairs of Ireland this year.

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COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland Salmon Fly 2012 is ... 'The Coldstream'

Each year the Great Game Fairs of Ireland commission one of Ireland's fly tyers to tie a commemorative fly and in 2012 with the overall fair theme being the year of the 'Salmon & Trout' Philip Lawton selected Jimmy Tyrrell as the tyer.

Philip takes up the story: "This year's salmon fly is designed and tied by well known fly tier, Jimmy Tyrrell, from Abbeyleix, Co Laois. Jimmy was born in Pontypool, South Wales in the fifties where he remembers to this day his first trout taken on a rod and worm combination from a small brook. His early days were spent, like many a young angler, crawling through briers and bushes so he could drop a line into the path of an unsuspecting trout. That first trout was about a quarter of a pound of beautifully red spotted joy that produced a picture that still remains in his mind and fired his life long love of fly fishing and tying.

He first became interested in fly tying when he was about ten years of age and received a fishing book for his birthday - full of pictures of beautifully tied salmon flies which sowed the seed for his later tying exploits. He once found a dead cock pheasant on the road and plucked some feathers which he used to tie his first flies with cotton thread to make some sort of 'fly' creation. He never got to use them as he didn't know what a fly rod or line was, never mind how to use one.

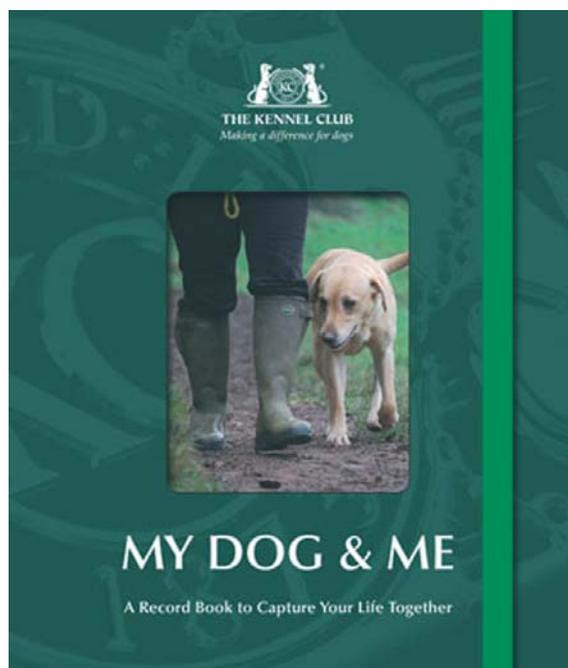
In the seventies, he moved with his wife and daughter to Abbeyleix and started to learn his trade as a fly tier. He bought his first vice and some materials from Mayo Flycraft and progressed from there. He regrets that he never had any lessons and learned in his early days from books which he has built on through many years of experience. He still has many of those early flies which remind him of how far he has come and that he is still learning.

When the Directors of The Great Game Fairs of Ireland asked him to design and tie a special fly for 2012 he cast his mind around for something a little bit different and the 'Coldstream' is the result. His friend, Pat Nolan, had given him some bear hair to try as a wing material and it came from a rather unusual source. This hair comes from off cuts of bearskin left over from making the distinctive busbies or bearskin hats worn by the various Guards regiments of the British Army including the famous Coldstream Guards who come from that famous fishing area where the Coldstream flows. After a bit of research he

discovered that, up to now at least, there is no fly called the Coldstream so here it is.

The tying of The Coldstream is as follows: **Tag.** Flat Silver, **Butt.** Fluorescent Green Floss, **Rib.** Silver Wire, **Body.** Flat Silver Tinsel, **Hackles.** First Blood Red Hackle from Soft Black Cock Hackle, **Wing.** Black Bear Fur with strands of flash over the top.

Jimmy often experiments with unusual patterns and materials when tying salmon flies for himself and while they don't all become 'killers' they often produce a surprise or two. This one looks a winner to my eye and I can't wait to wet one of them in the west of Ireland or perhaps in Lough Currane. As an old fishing friend of mine says when he looks at a fly: "If I were a salmon would I give that a chew? - I think I would - if I were a salmon!"



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The Cocker Spaniel Club of Ireland

Enda Jennings reports that The Cocker Spaniel Club of Ireland held its two Open (Confined) Cocker Trials on 15th and 24th of November 2011. This year the Trials took place on the Bracken Hill Shoot at Cranford Co. Donegal by kind invitation of Mr. Stuart McIntosh, Shoot Proprietor.

The scenic location of the Shoot became obvious as judges, competitors, stewards and spectators arrived at the section of the grounds allocated to the trials. This was hillside and small valleys as far as the eye could see. The ground consisted of bracken, heather, rushes and bramble resulting in all dogs receiving similar ground and as was to transpire very similar opportunities relating to game also. This was the ideal spaniel ground which had all the ingredients to ask all the questions of good spaniels. Should the complementary remarks of all in attendance be considered this ground was the real deal.

Game supply is a vital component to a successful field trial and those trials were the classic example of cooperation between Club and Shoot personnel. This was very obvious as Stuart and Club Field Trial Secretary, Enda Jennings, in their capacity as beat stewards, ran the day in a quiet and assured manner. Game produced on the day consisted of pheasants, partridge, duck, woodcock and snipe. Each dog had plenty of game to show their potential at all times.

Judges for the Trial on 15th November were Mr. Liam Dundon (A) from Co. Limerick and Mr. Andrew Robinson (A) of Whaupley Cocker from Yorkshire. Mr. Anthony Smyth from Co. Louth was (C) judge. A full card and reserves augured well for the future of working cockers.

The morning dawned dry and overcast for the trial on 15th November. A moderate breeze made hunting and shooting conditions ideal. The trial started in bracken interspersed with small patches of loose bramble. As the dogs continued the consistency of the ground became visible and also visible was the hunting quality of the cockers. All dogs were more than able to deal with the terrain and it was really developing into a quality trial. The guns were dealing with most of the game produced and were shooting for the dogs. As in all trials there were the unlucky and also the inexperienced dogs and handlers whose day will come. As the day progressed the quality and polish of the real contenders began to show. The three judges conferred and made up their books. Speculation was rife, was there a clear winner or was there to be a run off. The Secretary called four dogs to water and we were still in suspense.



Dogs and handlers - Ken Lindsay, Dessie Elliot, Paul Murphy, Jason McGonagle and steward Peter Curran.

The results were as follows:

- 1 Mr Paul Murphy's C.B. Oldgang Ginger of Jackshea. Graded Excellent.
- 2 Mr. Jason McGonagle's C.B. Sperrinside Breeze. Graded Very Good.
- 3 Mr. Ken Lindsay's Bannbracken Bramble. C.D. Graded Very Good.
- 4 Mr. Donal Creamer's. C.D. Cheweky Giggles. Graded Good.

At the presentation Field Trial Sec Enda Jennings thanked the Shoot Proprietor, Judges, Guns, the clubs Sponsor Triobloom Pet Foods and competitors for a very sporting and enjoyable day. He wished the Winner every success in the Spaniel Championship. Both judges were high in their praise of the ground and the game supply and the hunting qualities of all the dogs on the day. To quote one judge 'all dogs were having a real go.' Both also complemented all involved regarding the very sporting attitude shown during the whole day. The day concluded with the lady of the Shoot Trish extending an invitation to all present to some warm food in the very homely and comfortable guns room where the craic continued for sometime.

Second Trial

Pat Cox writes that the Club's second trial took place on 24th November. Once again the weather was favourable with a dry morning but a stronger wind. The trial commenced on different ground but in almost identical conditions of bramble, heather, rushes and bracken. The judges on this occasion were Mr. Aidan Patterson (A) from County Antrim and Mr. John Dickson (A) from Scotland and Mr. Christy Murphy (C) from County Mayo. A full card and reserves again was most encouraging for the future of working cockers. The trial started with the dogs hunting an upwind beat and as in the previous trial the standard of hunting by all the dogs was top drawer. Some dogs desire to get on with the job of finding game meant some steering problems for their handlers while again there were the unlucky ones where things just did not fall into place. Such are the uncertainties of field trials and dogs who lacked the bit of luck on the previous occasion were able to shine on this occasion. Once again the guns were well aware of the requirements for shooting for the benefit of the dogs. The game supply was just right, plentiful but not to the extent of a bird under every bush. Game came at regular intervals resulting in dogs meeting plenty game but needing good hunting performances to produce the game. This hunting requirement was visible in all the dogs. Some retrieving problems were to prove costly to some dogs on this occasion but another seasons experience will bring the required finish. The judges having gone through their books and spoke to the Secretary resulted in four dogs going to water.

A clean water test led to the following results:

- 1 Mr. Des Elliott's C.B. Abbylara Smarty. Graded Excellent.
- 2 Mr. Paul Cromwell's C.B. Higherend Buzi. Graded Very Good.
- 3 Mr. Ken Lindsay's C.D. Creccamarsh Ice. Graded Very Good.
- 4 Mr. Jason McGonagle's C.D. Sperrinside Swift. Graded Good.

The presentation of prizes and Trio Bloom Dog food were made to the award winners by Enda Jennings. Enda thanked the Brackenhill Shoot, the Guns, Judges, Competitors and all stewards who helped on both trial days. He wished the winner every success in the Spaniel Championship. Both judges expressed the view that the dogs were all good quality hunters and retrievers and the standard of dog work was of a very high standard overall. Both judges were agreed that the ground and game supply were of Championship standard. The owner of the winning dog thanked everybody involved and on behalf of the competitors made a presentation to Stuart and Trish. Mr Ken Lindsay on behalf of the competitors also thanked the Shoot for putting at our disposal such fantastic ground and game supply and the generosity shown to all on both days. He also referred to the grand sporting occasions that both days were, and felt field trials

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COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

needed such days. The formalities concluded with the presentation of a beautiful framed print of a cocker scene to Stuart and Trish on behalf of the Cocker Spaniel Club of Ireland. The origin of the picture came from the Creamer family who have for so many years contributed so much to the progression of all breeds of gundogs but particularly the working Cocker in this country. When it was decided to have a Spaniel Championship Tom and Kay Creamer were to the fore and maybe we sometimes forget what spaniel people like this contributed, so that we now have the opportunities we are blessed with today. Long may they continue. Mr. Stuart McIntosh thanked all for their generosity and kind remarks and thanked the club members for their help towards the Shoot on shoot days and indeed throughout the year.

Proof of progress

The two trials were both great sporting occasions and were solid proof of the progress of the working Cocker in Ireland. The fact all judges were loud in their praise of the overall standard of the dogs performances verifies the above. Both Andy Robinson and John Dickson both highly respected Cocker handlers and breeders in England and Scotland respectively expressed the opinion that any of the dogs competing in the trials would be well capable of competing in Cocker trials in England. Both also referred to the fact that all the dogs were top quality hunters and good clean retrievers. All Judges expressed the opinion that all the dogs were well capable of completing all the requirements of a days rough shooting which is the purpose of field trials. It should be mentioned that, during both trials, no dog was eliminated for pegging game.

Despite criticism of working cockers by some people, to whom we have yet to have the pleasure of extending a welcome to our cocker trials as either competitors or spectators, the opinions and presentation comments of the four Cocker judges of many years experience on both days must take preference. It should be stressed that the progression of the working cocker is a work in progress by people who are realistic enough to know that the future of any breed lies in the ability to be, to quote a very good friend shooting man and successful handler of Retrievers, Springer Spaniels and Cocker: 'One's own greatest critic and to be neither breed nor kennel blind.'

On completion of all formalities all present were invited into the Shoot's gunroom to be served with tasty hot refreshments courtesy of our Shoot hostess Trish, where good sporting stories continued for some hours.



Presentation from CSCOI Field Trial Secretary, Mr. Enda Jennings to Paul Murphy winner on 15 November 2011.



Presentation from CSCOI Field Trial Secretary, Mr. Enda Jennings to Des Elliott winner on 24 November 2011.

May Date for Inaugural Irish Cycling Show

Claimed to be Ireland's fastest growing sport worth over €130m, dates have been confirmed for The Irish Cycling Show, to be held in the main hall of the Simmonscourt Pavilion at the RDS, Dublin on May 19th and 20th 2012. Donegal-based events and media company Mara Media are the promoters of the major new event, the first of its kind in Ireland, which is a product of the massive growth in cycling over the past number of years.

"This show will give Irish firms an important promotional and sales outlet

during this growth period heralded by the success of the Cycle to Work Scheme and the explosion in leisure cycling,' says Mara Media's Hugh Bonner. The Irish Cycling Show will feature exhibitors from every facet of cycling and related industry including cycle retailers and distributors and there will also be emphasis on general feature attractions to entertain the whole family. Plans in the pipeline include a test track around the venue, demonstrations, shows and seminars throughout the weekend. Further details

on the shows attractions will be announced in the coming weeks. "This is an event for every branch of cycling activity from road cycling, BMX, mountain biking, competition, urban street cycling and all points in between," added Bonner. "As well as cycle sales companies we'll have exhibitors involved in coaching, cycling holidays, nutrition, health and cycle sport administration.

For general enquiries contact: Hugh Bonner + 353 86 8239607
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COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

The Carlisle Brothers Exhibition

It was a delight to join the Carlisle family at an exhibition at the Stables, Larchfield to launch the work of Eric Carlisle. The exhibition features works by Eric, David Mitchell, Mitchell McDade, Bert Carlisle and the late David Carlisle and as always a superb range of sticks by Lindsay Carlisle.

Carlises from this most sporting and artistic family were there in force to assist including Wayne, Eric's son, and Guy, Lindsay's son and the exhibition was opened by BBC broadcaster, Walter Love. Guests were treated to a buffet and sales and commissions of both art and sticks were reported to be good.



Brothers in Art: Lindsay, Eric and Bert Carlisle.



Deborah Robinson and Lyall Plant.



Radio personality Walter Love performed the opening ceremony.



Gilbert and Thelma Irvine with David Robinson.



Lindsay Carlisle and Lyall Plant.



Guy Carlisle, Irene Titterington and Liz McCracken.



Frankie McPhillips, Eric Carlisle and Victor McDevitt.



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Salmon Netting at Sea in Northern Ireland

The Ulster Angling Federation welcomed the information from the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL) that they cannot legally issue licences to net salmon this year due to the perilous status of the salmon population. This comes about as a direct result of the Ulster Angling Federation challenge to DCAL policy at the European Union Environment Directorate in Brussels.

The Federation can confirm that the remaining salmon nets are in breach of the Habitats Directive as they are mixed stock fisheries, and as such are illegal due to the stock collapse on the River Finn in Donegal, a Special Area of Conservation for salmon. Sadly DCAL for some years refused to see commonsense. Following a meeting at the EU in Brussels on January 24th, DCAL have moved now in the face of threats of huge fines from Europe. Despite a long series of meetings and correspondence over a number of years between The Ulster Angling Federation, the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NI), and DCAL, this Department continued to licence the remaining Mixed Stock Interceptory salmon Net Fishery which has been taking salmon destined for a large number of rivers in NI that are not meeting their Conservation Limit, and also the River Finn.

Under European law, DCAL have failed to make an appropriate assessment under article 6(3) of a plan or project likely to have a significant effect on the conservation status of a species (*Salmo Salar*) for which a Candidate Special area for Conservation has been identified in Ireland (the river Finn). They have licenced and allowed

the killing of an Annex II directed species without taking account of or consulting other member nations on the impact upon their SAC (the river Finn) of that licenced activity.

The Ulster Angling Federation policy remains the same as it has always been; that there is no future for commercial salmon netting, and that exploitation by rods only, with appropriate limits, offers the only prospect of a continued salmon presence in our rivers. Local Angling Associations have worked extremely hard for many years to conserve, protect, and enhance not only the fishery on rivers, but the entire river environment. This is important for its own sake, but also benefits local people and increasingly, visitors. Countless (voluntary) man-hours and hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent to improve rivers and associated fisheries: these Associations continue to provide a self-financing and voluntary community-based effort to look after the rivers. A huge effort is now underway to protect and conserve the salmon.

Accordingly, in recognition of the parlous state of most salmon stocks in the Province, the Ulster Angling Federation recommend that as salmon numbers are at a historically low point, angling associations give serious consideration to the immediate introduction of 'catch and release' for salmon in order to protect stocks. We must now build on this success of the Habitats Directive in protecting the remaining salmon stock and work across a range of measures to conserve and enhance this wonderful fish for the future.

John B Vallely art at the Castle Gallery, Lisburn

In the Winter edition of the magazine we reported on the sale of the John B Vallely painting of the 'Fiddle & Flute' for £5,400 at Ross's Auction. Unfortunately the photograph of the painting that was published was a John B Vallely painting but one of 'The Horse Fair' a 30" X 60" oil on sale for

£25,000 in the Castle Gallery, 13 Castle Street Lisburn BT27 4SP where it can be viewed or it can be viewed online at www.castlegalleryni.com. The gallery also stocks a wide range of exquisite art including Vallely prints. T: +44 (0)28 92 601094 E: info@castlegalleryni.com



The Horse Fair by John B Vallely.

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For more information, or information on The Moyle Shoot you can contact us on the above details, or alternatively: www.gunsonpegs.com



Damien Hannigan reports

Deer carcass handling seminars highlight vital skills

The Wild Deer Association of Ireland held two successful seminars which highlighted the skill and knowledge of deer carcass handling seminars, highlighting skills which are vital for experienced and inexperienced stalkers alike. Both events were very well supported by deer stalkers nationally, with over 180 attending. This is one of the most popular events the WDAI organises for deerstalkers, been the 13th consecutive year the event has been held.

Correct carcass handling is very important and some would say the real work begins after the animal is culled. This year's seminars included all facets of carcass handling with demonstrations on disease identification such as Liver Fluke & TB in wild deer, evisceration, carcass preparation and home butchery, cape preparation for taxidermy, tracking dogs for deer stalking. Those attending were also treated to a delicious venison BBQ and hot refreshments and both seminars were free of charge for WDAI members. For those looking for a bargain, a large display of butchery and stalking equipment was available at discounted prices, with all profits going to the WDAI.

While TB can be present in wild deer it is generally a rare occurrence based on the carcasses presented from all regions at our seminars over the last 13 years with less than 2% showing signs of TB, lowland and older animals were the common factors in effected animals. The reality is the badger is more likely to spread TB than a deer as they excrete TB in their urine and can contaminate large areas. All culled deer should be inspected for signs of TB & other illnesses; the common symptoms of TB are infected lymph glands at the back of the throat, abnormality in the gralloch and/or the pluck, while healthy lymph glands should always be grey or a pinky brown colour on examination.

If there are signs of TB it is incumbent on the deerstalker to immediately notify the landowner where the animal was shot along with informing the local DAFF veterinary office. Proper disposal of any infected carcass is key to avoid any further spread of the disease



David Dunne demonstrates the skinning process. through vermin feeding on the carcass and only recognised disposal facilities should be used such as a knackery.

Tracking Dogs

The WDAI has been to the fore in ensuring that the endorsed and ethical method of deer stalking with the aid of a tracking dog continues in Ireland by having the Wildlife Amendment Bill 2010 corrected to protect this important practice. Unlike other forms of hunting, it is not to seek and find a live quarry. The dogs are used to locate a fallen deer quickly so that the animal may be dispatched humanely. In the unlikely event of a deer being wounded, it immediately retreats and hides in deep cover. Without the assistance of tracking dogs, it could take a deerstalker a long time to locate a wounded deer or the deer might never be found. Thus, the purpose of using dogs is an entirely humane one. Following our seminar in Cahir, Co Tipperary which included a presentation on tracking dog breeds and due to growing demand it has been decided that the WDAI will form the first dedicated group for those with an interest in tracking dogs in Ireland, with an aim to providing and sharing information along with hosting related events. If you would like to join this group please contact Paul Hogan on 087 1425527 or email us at wilddeerireland@gmail.com. We already have had an excellent response following our presentation of tracking dogs.

For further information go to www.wilddeerireland.com or email wilddeerireland@gmail.com you can also follow us on Twitter @wilddeerireland or 'like' our Facebook page for all the latest news and events.



The seminars attracted a large group of participants

Assembly agrees tougher stance on Strangford Lough

At the end of January, the Northern Ireland Assembly today supported new measures for better protection of Strangford Lough. Measures to protect, monitor and restore the biogenic reefs were agreed following a debate sponsored by the Environment Committee. This useful agreement comes on the eve of an important meeting between EU and Government officials to discuss the plight of Strangford Lough. There is a real threat that infraction action in the form of significant fines for Northern Ireland could occur.

Outlining the enhanced joined up approach, Environment Minister Alex Attwood said: "It is important that we develop a joined up approach to protect and restore this unique habitat which has

been compared to Northern Ireland's barrier reef. We will introduce, following consultation, two additional sea fisheries exclusion zones, doubling the number at the Lough. We will also, following consultation, introduce by laws to regulate mooring, anchoring and diving. We will undertake further scientific research to examine ways of restoring the biogenic reefs. Today's agreement in the Assembly demonstrates a more robust joined up approach to protect and develop Strangford Lough and that is very much welcome. I believe that this is a positive sign for the Lough and to the EU. I want it clearly understood that a determined approach is now in place and being put in place."

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COUNTRYSIDE NEWS

Irish Country Sports & Country Life's Lifetime Achievement Award for George Briscoe, M.H.



George Briscoe (centre) - was the worthy recipient of a coveted Irish Country Sports & Country Life 'Lifetime Achievement Award'

George Briscoe, M.H is celebrating not one but two significant dates this hunting season having received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Irish Country Sports and Country Life Magazine for his long service to fieldsports. In November, George was surprised at the opening lawn meet of the Tara Harriers at his home near Bective, Co. Meath when Tom Fulton and Philip Lawton, on behalf of the magazine, presented him with a fine crystal decanter while he was loudly applauded by his fellow joint masters and the members and followers of the hunt.

A lawn meet at Georges' is a highlight of the Tara's hunting calendar and his lovely wife, Jean and her able army of helpers put up some real culinary delights. This season is his seventieth as a Master of the Tara Harriers and his ninetieth since he first saw the light of day. George started hunting as a child under his father's tutelage and is a keen angler and shooter apart from his long career hunting the

hare with the Taras across the fields and hedgerows of Co. Meath and its surrounding counties. He has been active in many of the campaigns fieldsports people have had to fight to retain their pastimes and has never stinted to give freely of his time and talents. He is always generous with both his time and experience in the field and has written extensively on his many hunting trials and tribulations but well sprinkled with the good days and always in an entertaining way.

I have known George for quite a few seasons now and have had the great pleasure of standing beside him on many a river bank and covert edge. He epitomises the genuine sportsmanship and friendship found in countrysports and is always delight to spend time with. George has that open heartedness that welcomes the newcomer and, in the nicest way possible, instils safety and good sportsmanship. Long may he enjoy his sports.

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland make further history - and there's a bonus for customers as well!

This year sees the team from the Great Game Fairs of Ireland make further country sports history with their Irish Game Fair planned for Shanes Castle on the 7th & 8th July. This will be their 50th Irish Game or Country Fair since they launched the Irish Game Fair concept in 1978.

This makes Albert Titterington the longest serving game fair director in the world and we understand he has no intentions of retiring as his 60th and hopefully his 70th fair are well within his grasp!

To celebrate this special occasion and thank the loyal customers who have helped us set record attendances at our fairs in 2009, 2010 and 2011, we are introducing a discount system for those attending two or more fairs.

All persons purchasing a ticket at Ballywalter for £10 (programme and parking FREE) will receive a voucher for £5 off. As we wish to encourage families the discount is even greater! A family purchasing a ticket for Ballywalter will receive a £15 discount off the admission price of the Shanes Castle event and €10 off the admission price for the Birr Castle Fair and €20 off the price of the Birr Castle event.

So, having had an action packed day out at Ballywalter for the normal price, they can have a second great day at Shanes Castle for just £10 - and another at Birr Castle for just €15. All with FREE parking and FREE programme.

Definitely the best fairs, but now very definitely the best value admission prices!

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The Ballywalter Game & Country Living Fair

Described last year as a 'very classy boutique' Game Fair, the fair at Ballywalter certainly gets the Irish game and country fair season off to a very stylish start in the beautiful setting of Ballywalter Park Estate on Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th May 2012.

Utilising the huge natural advantages synonymous with the Great Game Fairs - the traditional venue of a large well maintained house, exquisite lawns, stable yard, woodland, parkland and a lake will deliver an entertaining, uniquely stylish country sports and living experience for anyone who lives, works or plays in the Irish countryside.



Cancelled by its then organisers in and rescued from oblivion - by the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team - the successful one day event in 2010 was followed in 2011 by a very traditional and atmospheric two day event, bathed in sunshine, and reminiscent of the great County Down fairs staged at Clondeboye Estate.

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland stable includes the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle (which in 2011 broke all records for attendance for an Irish game or country fair ever, firmly establishing it as Ireland's premier game or country fair) and the Irish Game & Country Fair (the ROI's largest game or country fair). With the Shanes Castle event celebrating a unique milestone as the team's 50th Irish game and country fair the big question for the organisers was where to go with the Ballywalter event to make it even bigger and better?

And with their usual creative marketing flair, they have built even more attractions into the mix for Ballywalter with a concept to create a unique and highly successful event, that will be second only to the Shanes Castle fair in Northern Ireland.

Value for Money

And in line with their commitment to quality - delivering the best country sports and living competitions and entertainment in the country as a value for money experience for hard pressed families. This year the loyalty of the customers whose support has



Some distinguished guests in 2012.

given the Great Game Fairs of Ireland their pre-eminent position in the market place will be rewarded by a superb discounted ticket offer. The purchase of an adult ticket at Ballywalter for £10 will receive a voucher for £5 off admission to the Shanes Castle Fair & €10 off the admission price for the Birr Castle Fair. The purchase of a family ticket at Ballywalter will qualify for a £15 discount off the admission price of the Shanes Castle event and €20 off the price of the Birr Castle event. All with FREE parking and FREE programme.

Superb Competitions

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland commitment to excellence also gives competitors Ireland's most prestigious top shooting, fishing, gundog and terrier & lurcher events - with top prize funds rarely bettered anywhere the UK. And this year, there will be new innovative competitions to give Ballywalter and the other two fairs a range of competitions and prize fund unequalled in Ireland.

Ballywalter will host qualifiers for the All Ireland All Comers Game Fair Championships in clay shooting fly casting and gundog handling. The winners will go forward to the finals at Birr Castle to compete for these prestigious titles and a serious prize fund.

Not only that, the Ballywalter Fair will also host heats for the Barbour All Ireland Novice Game Fair Championships with the 2012 finals at Shanes Castle.

Angling at Ballywalter staged on the lawns of the house

The Game Angling Instructors Association (GAIA) will be running the angling related events at this year's Ballywalter Game and Country Fair. APGAI Ireland will also be in attendance.



Game Fair Director Philip Lawton with Sponsor Gordon Nesbitt from Atkins Angling and Mark Patterson

GAIA is committed to providing excellence of instruction and coaching in fly casting, game angling and fly tying in all areas of the sport, from river to lake to stream and sea. All GAIA instructors/coaches are qualified and undergo continuous professional development to ensure their skills are developed and maintained to the highest of standards.

Unique demonstrations of angling expertise will be carried out by GAIA instructors. The casting events will be coordinated by Mark Patterson, APGAI, who is GAIA's regional representative in Ireland. The prizes for the casting competition have been generously donated by Atkins Angling, Loop Tackle and Shimano/G.Loomis. You will find Atkins Angling in the Angling Village and they will have a full range of Loop tackle on show.

Experienced instructors will also be offering instruction throughout the fair. They will be able to offer instruction to complete beginners all the way through to experienced anglers who want to brush up their casting as well as being able to offer mentoring to anyone aspiring to become an instructor.

Glenda Powell, no stranger to the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, will also be entering into the spirit of the Victorian theme in appropriate period dress and gracing the main arena with the eye catching casting demonstrations for which she is renowned.

The Year of the 'Salmon & Trout'

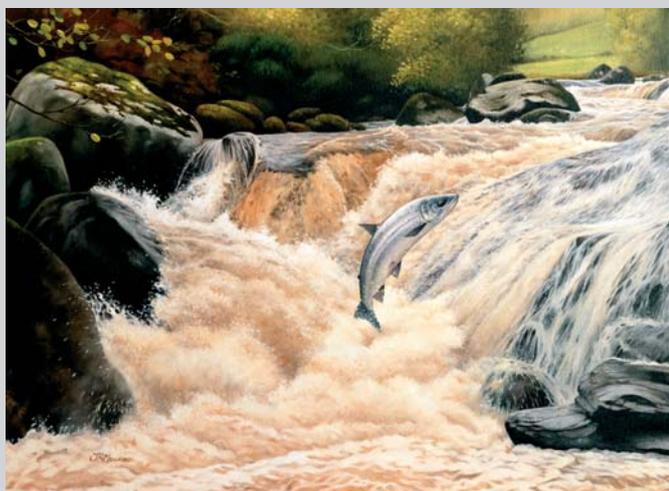
Following the successful Year of the Horse theme in 2010 and 'Year of the Dog' in 2011 the Great Game Fairs of Ireland 2012 theme moves towards game fishing with the 'Year of the Salmon and Trout.' With the recent controversy over netting this theme is likely to prove even more relevant than at first thought. The centre piece of each enhanced Angling Village will be an Angling Pavilion featuring not only the joys and skills associated with Game Angling but also the history and traditions of the sport and the environmental threats to the sport.

Many organisations will be involved in first Ballywalter and then with even more enhanced villages at Shanes and Birr but FISSTA and APGAI Ireland have proven to be of tremendous support in taking the concept forward. APGAI Ireland will have a major presence in the angling pavilion at Ballywalter and with FISSTA will be largely responsible for co-ordinating the Angling Villages at Birr and Shanes Castle.

As usual with one of our core themes we like to have certain iconic images and this year the honour of producing the Great Game Fairs of Ireland painting goes to Cullybackey artist John Moore and the tying of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland Fly goes to Jimmy Tyrrell. Both will be mounting displays at the great Game Fairs of Ireland.

Salmon on the Glendun River by John Moore

An image from John's painting of Salmon on the Glendun River graces the front cover of the magazine. A limited edition print run of the painting will be produced by WG Baird Ltd and with the painting will be donated to FIISTA to be sold with ALL proceeds going to FISSTA's youth programme. The one exception to this will be the specially remarked and framed No 1 print which Irish Countrysports and Country Life magazine is donating to the APGAIL fund raising initiative for Laurence Finney's son. Other donations to this have been made by some of our exhibitors and advertisers including a superb suit of Climb8 Waterproof clothing by Jane Pilkington. We would ask readers to support this APGAIL initiative.



Gundogs at Ballywalter

This year both retrievers and spaniels will be tested over an enlarged course with the added attraction of having real water retrieves on the superb lake in the grounds.

Saturday will feature a North v South Spaniel test where a Northern Ireland Team will meet a Massbrook sponsored team led by Jon Binley. There will also be Novice and Open spaniel tests and a Novice retriever Test.

Sunday will see a North v South Retriever Test where once again a Massbrook sponsored Team will meet an Ulster Select Team. There will also be a Retriever Open test.

A fitting finale to some top quality gundog work will be on Sunday when the top Spaniel v the top Retriever in the Dubarry Challenge with the winner winning a superb pair of Dubarry boots.

And for those with a good arm Comber Wildfowlers are again running their Game Fair Dummy Throwing Challenge.

Eddie Moore will be running a scurry both days with the top two dogs each day qualifying for a grand 'fastest gundog in Ireland' final at Shanes Castle.

Speaking of Fast Dogs – The Master McGrath International Challenge

The Terrier & Lurcher events at Ballywalter in 2011 were a huge success. Unlike other show organisers we consider these events should be part of the fair and not hidden away outside the main event. And in 2011 when the organisers were thinking of a new Irish lurcher racing challenge in 2011 it was felt most appropriate to call it the 'Master McGrath Challenge.' The objective is simple - to find the fastest dog in the UK and Ireland and to set a British & Irish record for a distance of 150 yards. Where else but at Ballywalter!

The top dogs over and under 23 lurcher racing will qualify for the final at Shanes Castle with a prize fund of over €1000. Another event for which Ballywalter has a qualifier is the Five Nations Lurcher Championships with its final at Birr Castle. Once again this has a prize fund of over €1,000.

Any show organiser wanting to host qualifiers for these prestigious competitions should contact Albert Titterington at irishgamefair@btinternet.com

Of course the Great Game Fairs of Ireland lead where others follow and for Shanes Castle the Philip Lawton's Directors Challenge for Novice Dogs: This will be run over three classification of heats with heats for (a) Rough Coated Lurchers (b) Terrier or Collie Bred Lurcher (c) Long Dog (sight hound bred lurcher) there will be a prize for each grouping and the top two dogs from each classification will compete for the €300 prize in a six dog final. However we have had such a good response to this that we have decided to run a similar Novice Challenge at Ballywalter – the Premier Event Catering Challenge with a £40 prize for each class winner and a £50 prize for the overall winner all kindly sponsored by Martin Barrett of Premier Event Catering.



John Humphreys Winner of the first Master McGrath Challenge with the painting of his dog by David Prescott.



The Team from Ballycranmore at the 2011 launch.

There has been some controversy in terms of classifying whippets for racing. At Ballywalter we will have two classes (a) Pure Bred Whippets registered and Unregistered. (b) No Ped Whippets or Under 21" Lurchers. We will review these classifications for Shanes Castle.

Clayshooting at Ballywalter

Clays are in the capable hands of the Ballycranmore club supported by BASC. The top four guns will qualify for the final of the All Ireland Game Fair Championships at Birr Castle and the top four novice guns for the final of the Barbour Novice Championships at Shanes Castle.

The extensive prize fund for the shooting at Ballywalter is still being added to but prizes for include a Bettinsoli Shotgun sponsored by Donal Mc Cloy, two quality watches sponsored by Gardiner Brothers of Belfast and cash prizes donated by Irish Countrysports and Country Life magazine and other sponsors.

The Tented Village

The enhanced Angling Village is typical of how all areas of the tented village have been upgraded. The extensive range of angling products is supported by similarly enlarged displays of guns, accessories, clothing, canine products, fine food and indeed

everything connected with country living and lifestyle.

Another keynote feature is the 'Ards and County Down Past & Present Pavilion' featuring all manner of historical and traditional crafts and displays including the history of the lough and peninsula including a wildfowling exhibit co-ordinated by the Joint Council, a display by the Linen Museum, traditional spinning, weaving and dyeing displays, quilting and even a Titanic display.

And Living History

Visitors to the fair may think that they have walked on to the set of Downton Abbey or Upstairs Downstairs as the fair will create the atmosphere of a traditional estate in the Georgian era which was of course a golden era for field sports and rural pastimes through the patronage of the Royal Family, particularly Prince Albert.

Of course there is no finer setting to creating such an atmosphere than the stylish and well kept lawns and parkland and the backdrop and centre piece of a fine Victorian house.

The theme of the house and family's Victorian/Edwardian past will permeate all aspects of the fair with carriages and vintage vehicles displayed in front of the house; a Napoleonic and Victorian military encampment and displays being staged at the house;



Living History brought to life Muzzle Loaders and two stylish gentlemen.



and traditional falconry, period angling and Victorian archery displays all taking place on the manicured lawns. There will several other historical cameos as Master McGrath was of course presented at court to Queen Victoria and the Queen was reported to have broken a dinner plate at 100 yards with a Whitworth rifle. Traditional fowling has always been a feature of the Ballywalter fair with a superb displays by the Strangford Lough Joint Council and the Edgar family and of course



The Edgars' Punt

the unique punt gunning demonstration on the lake. Last year's demonstration was carried out by Andy Scullion and this year will be carried out by Liz and Mark Edgar.

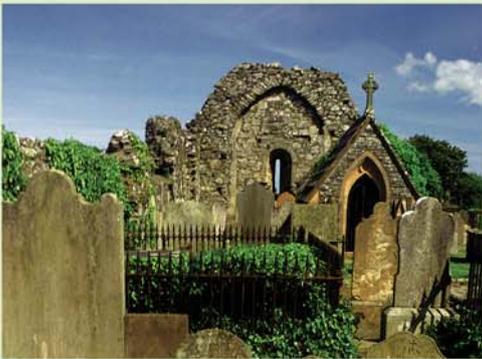
Children

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland have always had a family focus and apart from the 'family friendly' discounted ticket offers to provide economy family entertainment over our three events, the Ballywalter Fair has a host of attractions to entrain and educate the whole family especially the children. There are huge opportunities to see and in most cases handle all sorts of animals including ferrets, falcons, sea life and even pythons and spiders! And great opportunities for historical interaction with experienced re-enactors; displays of vintage cars, carriages and old military vehicles as well as the children's area with the usual amusements and of course the huge array of main arena attractions and events.

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Napoleonic Firepower

Main Arena

In the main arena several historical displays will include the Victorian Poacher plying his long netting



trade, the ever popular muzzle loaders who will also shoot clay pigeons with their period pieces, a large range of Napoleonic firepower; cavalcades of horse drawn vehicles and vintage vehicles and of course Georgian theatre.

These will combine with gundog, horse and hound, dog agility, terrier & lurcher and falconry displays, plus the Cochise Horses and the inimitable Keith Mathews Dog Guru training class – this year with prizes for the best child, lady and gent handler being sponsored by Countryside Alliance Ireland – so bring your dog along to help improve its behaviour and your handling skills and you could both be walking away with some silverware!

Part of the crowd watching Keith Mathews display at Ballywalter in 2011.



You are cordially invited to visit the

Flavour Food Festival

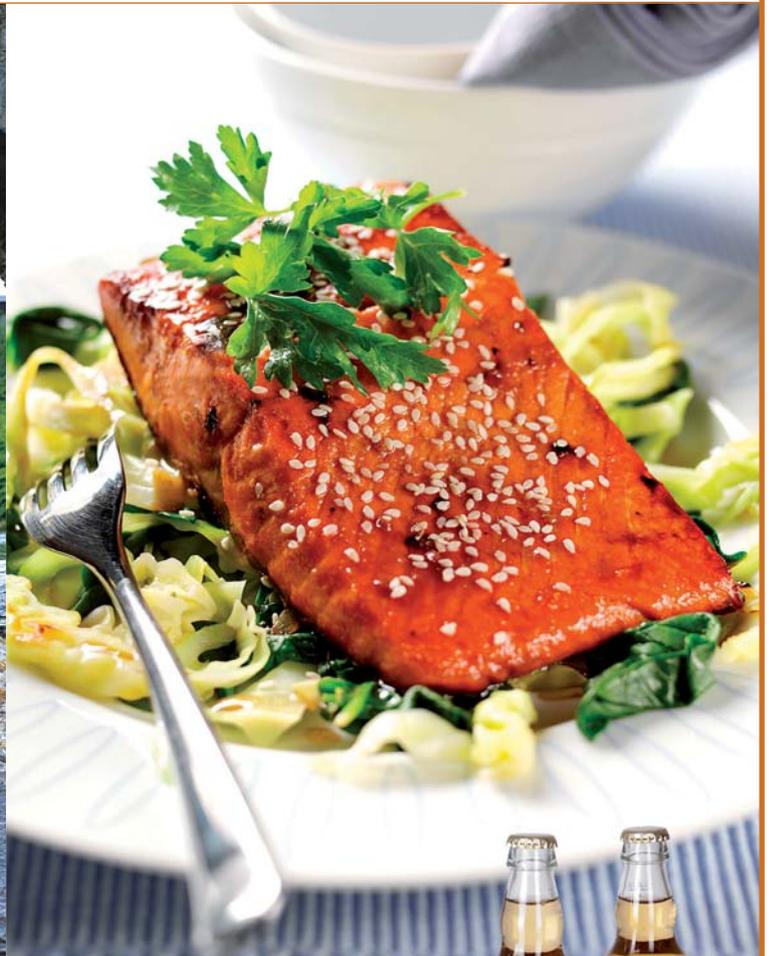
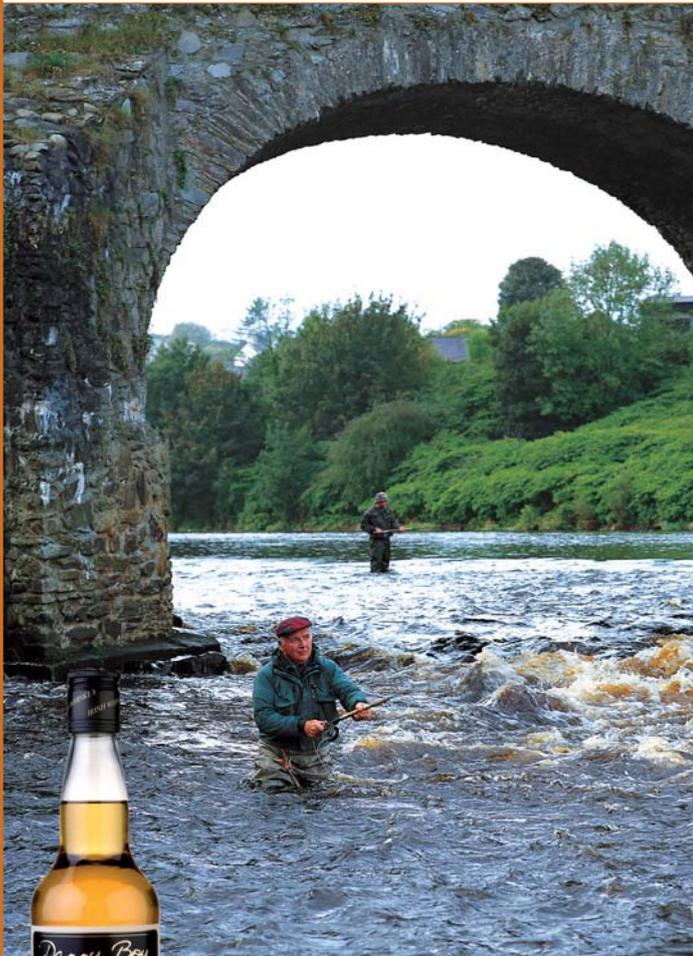
in the courtyard at

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A flavour of fine food

The Flavour Food Festival in the courtyard is set to be a key ingredient to the day out at this year's Ballywalter Game & Country Living Fair. Organised and hosted by Flavour magazine, the Food Festival will bring together an eclectic mix of producers from the region, allowing visitors to sample and buy some of the finest food and drink available in Ireland. From handmade preserves and local whiskey to artisan breads and fine wines, there will be something sure to tickle your taste buds! Take a stroll up to the courtyard and you are in for some real food - and tittle - treats, as all the stand holders will be offering samples of their produce as well as the chance to buy your own goodies. Visitors to the Flavour Food Festival will also have the opportunity to enter a free draw to win a fantastic hamper of delicious treats, courtesy of Flavour magazine, so don't miss out, put the

dates in your dairy to discover some great local tastes of home. You'd better bring your shopping bags too, because you'll want to take some of those fabulous

flavours home! To make shopping easy, the Flavour stand will be offering a 'shop and drop' facility, where you can leave your bags and collect when you're ready to go home. There'll be a small fee for the service - fifty pence - but all proceeds will be going to charity - you even get to vote for which charity and the charity with most votes at the end of the two days will reap the rewards!

Discover more

If you enjoy good food when you go out, whether that's to a top notch restaurant, for a pub lunch or to a café, you'll find your visit to the courtyard and the Flavour stand invaluable. There will be back editions of Flavour magazine - including the November/December game cooking edition, which proved so popular at the recent Mullahead Ploughing Championship, and you can also pick up your copy of the newly published 2012 Taste of Ulster Guide. Covering Northern Ireland county by county, the Taste of Ulster Guide tells you everything you need to know about

eating out in the best establishments, dedicated to local, seasonal food, exceptional service and great, all round hospitality. You'll also find information from Good Food Ireland, telling you about the best

the weekend. In keeping with the setting of Ballywalter Park and the historical theme of the fair, Flavour's chefs will be recreating a little taste from the Edwardian kitchen. Rolling out the Great Game



Barbara-Ann is another Kilkeel wanderer returned, this time from California, with an -American husband and a great range of authentic regional American sauces, chilli jellies and herb infused seal salts. Come along to the Flavour Food Festival and give them a try.

producers, best eateries and the finest food from the whole island of Ireland.

Fairs of Ireland 'Year of the Salmon and Sea Trout, you will be delighted with tasty family dinners and

Get cooking!

Bringing the courtyard alive with wonderful smells, tastes and entertainment, the Flavour Food Festival's cookery demonstrations in association with the Ulster Pork and Bacon Forum will explore the themes of the Ballywalter Fair in mouth-watering style throughout



You're familiar with the 'wild geese' who fled Ireland to the vineyards of France, but Terry Cross, who owns the Chateau de la Ligne estate and vineyards in Bordeaux is still firmly rooted at home in his native Belfast. He's passionate about his wine though and it is quite exceptional, so make sure you try a taste - and maybe bring a bottle home from the Flavour Food Festival.

Jenna Haugh's gap year working in Australia certainly changed her life. There, the Kilkeel girl found Pukara Estate olive grove in the Hunter Valley and loved the place and the product so much, she came home to import this finest quality olive oil to Ireland. She offers a wonderful range of oils, balsamic vinegars and might also have something new to show around at the Flavour Food Festival in the Courtyard at Ballywalter. You'll have to visit to discover what...





Kathy Jensen

Emma Cowan

Kate Richey

easy entertaining options to transform your catch that the chefs will demonstrate step by step using local, organic North Atlantic salmon. And of course, there'll be great ideas for cooking Northern Ireland pork and bacon – not forgetting the humble (but delicious) sausage. There will be fresh, seasonal and locally grown vegetables threaded through all the demonstrations and Flavour's chefs will be demonstrating how to use some of the produce on display in the marqu e.

Welcome to Flavour

The Food Festival in the Courtyard at Ballywalter is being run this year by Flavour. Launched in August 2011, Flavour magazine has certainly captured the attention of the foodie public, with its unique blend of recipes for great seasonal eating, features that explore the food and drink heritage of the northernmost twelve counties of Ireland and interviews with or recipes from people we all know and love, from Pamela Ballantine to Jenny Bristow.

The Flavour team comprises Kathy Jensen, Emma Cowan (who some readers might remember from 'Irish Hunting Shooting & Fishing' days) and Kate Richey and all three will be on hand throughout the Flavour Food Festival at Ballywalter – along with one or two helpers and maybe a newshound or two! Everyone at Flavour is passionate about great local food, tastes, shops, eateries and recipes, and the team travels the region, from Monaghan to Portrush and from Strangford to Donegal,

It's a Titanic year for Northern Ireland and here's your chance to enjoy a snifter of Titanic Whiskey, the latest offering from lottery winner Peter Lavery, who famously launched Danny Boy whiskey back in 2009. Both are now distilled at The Belfast Distillery, in the old Crumlin Road Gaol.



talking to chefs, shopkeepers, producers and foodie folk in search of the best. You can expect the Flavour team to bring all that passion to the Flavour Food Festival at Ballywalter Game & Country Living Fair.



Armagh Cider Company is a familiar treat at the Great Game Fairs of Ireland and this year, artisan cider producer Helen Troughton is to be found in the Flavour Food Festival marqu e, where she and the team will be sampling and selling the delicious range of ciders, juices and vinegar with mother. What's that? Vist the stand to find out...

Larne-based artisan and family bakery, Ann's Pantry has been baking really special breads using locally sourced ingredients since 1967. The results speak for themselves – Ann's Pantry was the only bakery in the UK and Ireland to reach the final of the 2011 Great Taste Awards, gaining 3 gold stars, the highest accolade possible for its White Soda Spelt Farl. Taste for yourself at the Flavour Food Festival!



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The biggest and best Irish retailer of guns and shooting equipment has just got even bigger and even better.

Donal McCloy Guns Unlimited has just moved to spacious new purpose built premises to enable them to carry even more stock and supply the ultimate shopping experience for customers.

Take what you have already and improve it! That was the plan for Donal McCloy when he analysed the previous premises outside Toome which up until recently many thought simply couldn't be bettered. More quality stock, more choice, even better facilities for customers were the top priorities along with accommodation designed firmly with the customer in mind. Rather than try to offer that where he was, Donal produced the blueprint for one of Ireland's best ever gun shopping experiences.



Donal McCloy: customer satisfaction is our No 1 aim.



The largest selection of guns and shooting accessories in the country.

The new 8,500 square feet premises, ideally located in Toome really are something really special. From the eye catching logo on the fine entrance gateposts to the heart of the large retail premises, everything exudes quality - and we haven't even mentioned the vast stock on display for customers. Now that will really have you spoilt for choice!

In the modern Hi Tech surroundings, plush leather furnishings echo the very best bespoke gun shops of London, brought right up to date with the futuristic decor. Just step through the door and immediately you sense 'quality' as you wander through the top quality range of clothing and accessories on your way to the gunroom.



An unmatched selection of country clothing and equipment.

two lurking amongst the stock along with other English guns as well. New models are there in abundance of course but there are some fine deals to be had with the preowned guns as well.

Forget about the catalogues - it's more than likely it's here at Donal McCloy Guns Unlimited and in your size too. The very latest designs from Beretta, Laksen, Browning, Hoggs of Fife, Le Chameau, Seeland, Harikla, Toggi, Musto, Castellani, and other top brands are here, just urging you to relax and try them on.

Incidentally, McCloys will be among the first in the country to stock the amazing new Beretta range of clothing with displays of 'next' season's stock well ahead of time. There's a vast stock and more is arriving every day.



Everything for the shooting enthusiast.

Your jaw really will drop when you see the gunroom. You expect to see the usual large McCloy stock of guns, but here in the new gunroom is an even bigger selection of rifles, airguns and shotguns. The largest display in the country just got bigger.



Spoilt for choice: Donal with even more of the guns in stock.

They range from reasonably priced rifles and shotguns to the ones that you might only dream about. Everywhere are Berettas, Brownings, Miroukus, Bettinsolis, Famars, Perazzis, Benellis, and Zolis to name but some of the brands. Why, there's even a Purdey or



Relaxing: Make your shopping experience a real pleasure at McCloys.

And of course, with huge stocks of clothing and accessories, customers get the widest choice, all at the best possible prices. 'Browse at your leisure' are the watchwords at Donal McCloys Guns Unlimited. Here

they believe that shopping should be a relaxing, enjoyable experience for customers. Maybe you're just looking at the moment? No problem, just ask a member of staff if you need advice. Take your time.



The team: *Ir Emma, Peadar, Gemma, Donal, Jane and Eunan.*

The premises might be bigger and better but the staff are every bit as helpful as ever and a gun-fitting service can also be arranged as well. When you drop by, look out for Eunan and Peadar in the gun department while Gemma and Jane McCloy take care of the rest of the business.



Emma Leslie is just as much a shooting star as an IT expert.

And a new person has just joined the team to look after marketing and operating the website, Emma Leslie. A computer expert she may be, but this young lady is an international clay pigeon shot with recent big wins in the trap discipline.

A huge range of every conceivable accessory complements the stock of guns and clothing. From

quality binoculars to clays and a fine range of Laporte traps, from interchangeable chokes to cleaning equipment and telescopic sights McCloy's Guns Unlimited has it right there. You will be spoiled for choice.

So, if you are thinking of new country clothing, gun or accessory there is only one to choose - Donal McCloy Guns Unlimited.

The biggest stock, luxurious surroundings and the friendly helpful staff make McCloy's Guns Unlimited the ultimate shopping experience. The best just got better.

If you are thinking of dropping in, heading towards Derry from Toome take the first road on the left as you leave the village. It's also the last road on your right coming from the Derry direction into Toome and the new premises are 150 yards up on your left. Watch out for the logos on the entrance pillars.

And as a thank you to customers old and new, the first hundred and fifty customers to the new premises will receive a pair of FREE tickets to the Ballywalter Game Fair where Donal and the team will be displaying one of the finest range of guns to be seen at any outdoor event.

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Torray



The Torray is a premium field sports boot with the Mossy Oak break-up camouflage pattern over the full surface of the boot. It has additional rubber overlays for reinforced toe, heel and Achilles areas. Breathable Airmesh Lining with extra fleece lining for superb insulation and comfort.

Size 4 -13 Price £120

Esk



The Esk has a heavy duty sole making it ideal for agricultural or equestrian use. Colours Black or Green. Breathable Airmesh Lining.

Size 4-13 Price £90

Tay Sport



The Tay Sport has been specifically designed for country sports wear. It has a sticky rubber sole with 5mm cleats and phylon mid sole with additional rubber overlays for reinforcing toe, heel and Achilles areas. Breathable Airmesh Lining with extra fleece lining for superb insulation and comfort.

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Greta



The Greta are ladies boots suitable for both work and leisure. They have 5mm CR-Foam insulation and toe and heel reinforcement. They are available in Fuchsia and Violet colours.

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Lune



The Lune Ankle Boot is a high ankle boot suitable for field sports applications for comfort and warmth whatever the weather. It is lightweight and durable with a Breathable Airmesh Lining.

Sizes 4-13 Price £70

Everest



Grisport Everest a brown leather or Olive Nubuck walking boot from the Italian manufacturer.

Sizes 36-47 Price £75

Timber



Grisport Timber Hiking Boot are constructed from waxed Italian 'Dakar' leather and lined with a SpoTex Waterproof and Breathable Membrane. They also benefit from taped seams and a Lightweight Trekking Sole.

Sizes 4-0 -47 Price £65

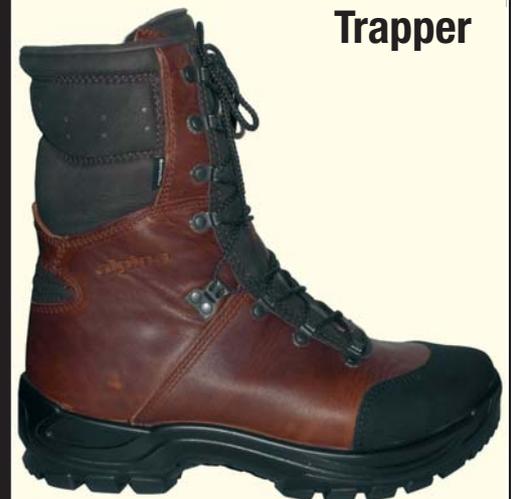
Ranger



Grisport Ranger is a hunting/ shooting country sports boot, a quality leather Italian-made boot, with a waterproof and breathable lining and beautifully padded throughout for wearer comfort. The Ranger also has a anti-slip vibram sole and pre-waxed leather for extra protection. Weight 1685g

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Joe Craig - a true gentleman of the gundog world

On the 24th of January Joe Craig, of Downpatrick, celebrated his 90th birthday. While most men of his age spend their time sitting quietly by the fireside, Joe is still out and about with his Labradors on a daily basis. In fact he did not miss a single day's 'picking up' during the past season on the nearby Ballydugan Estate.

Over the years, Joe has enjoyed great success in field trials especially competing in the early 1960s with such legendary handlers as Jim Cranston, Robert O'Farrell, Major Pakenham-Mahon, Ruth Tenison and his good friend Sam Jennett. Sadly, all these great handlers and gundog enthusiasts have passed away.

Perhaps the first really good dog that Joe ran was the very famous Derryboy Daniel. Joe purchased Daniel as a puppy from Margaret Glossop and trained and handled to win two open stakes as well as numerous working tests. He also showed him in the Field Trial class at Crufts, being voted the 'dog with the waggiest tail' and then appeared with him on television on the Blue Peter programme. Following this Margaret bought him back and she went on to make him an Int. FT. Ch. and he became one of the most successful Labradors to stand at stud.

In fact, the first litter sired by Daniel was out of Joe's own bitch FTW Sooty of Meadowbrae and this produced FT. Ch. Meadowbrae Wigeon, the winner of the Irish Retriever Championships and top dog at the CLA Fair for Robert Horner.

About 10 years later along came a dog which Joe regards as his best ever. This was FT. Ch. Meadowbrae Survivor winner of five or six Open Stakes and a member of three successful Irish teams at the CLA Game Fairs. He was very aptly named as he was one of a litter of 12 puppies, all of which perished, except him, with what was probably the dreaded 'Fading Puppy Syndrome.' His kennel name was Shane and as a young dog he showed very little promise being slow to learn even basic directional training. However, at about 11 months of age Joe

decided to take him, on the lead of course, to a driven day at Ballydugan Estate. At the second drive a hen pheasant was shot which fell, apparently stone dead, about 80 yards from Joe and 20 yards from an overgrown disused railway embankment. Thinking that this would make a nice introduction to warm game for his young dog, Joe waited until the drive was over and then cast the pup for the bird. When Shane was about halfway to the hen she suddenly revived and legged it into the nearby heavy cover. The pup went straight to the fall, put his nose down and took a perfect line after the bird which he produced after a few minutes. This was an indication of things to come in later life as Meadowbrae Survivor proved himself to be one of the best retrievers of 'runners' seen in trials in recent years. The two strong running cock pheasants taken by him on his way to victory at Baronscourt and Larchfield are still talked about today.

While Joe doesn't get to many trials nowadays he still enjoys competing in a few working tests during the summer, particularly at Lough Bawn, Co Monaghan, which is his favourite venue.

We can only wish Joe many more years of good health to enjoy his beloved Labradors and continue setting an example to us all. Happy birthday Joe!

*The one and only Joe Craig.
(photo by Christopher Boake)*



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Irish Retriever Championship 2011



All the competitors at the start of the 2011 Championship.

The 44th Irish Retriever Championship stake was held at Ballincor Estate, Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow on Thursday 29th December and Friday 30th December 2011. This is one of the best sporting shoots in Ireland and our generous hosts Sir Robert and Lady Goff and their team could not have done more to assist in the successful running of this year's event, the pinnacle of the trialling calendar. But even with their best endeavours they could not control the weather and "Mother Nature" had her say in proceedings. I'm reluctant to say that this year's special event will be remembered as much for the appalling weather as the actual dog work and this is in no way a reflection on the dogs competing or meant to undermine

the success of the award winners who justly deserve their 'moment in the sun.'

This was not a championship for adjectives like 'best ever' or 'classic' but serious consideration was obviously given to the important issue of safety for all involved, guns, beaters, handlers, dogs and spectators. Many of the drives were in open ground away from any danger of trees falling and this offered limited choice of retrieves to the judges.

For me, I can't remember such punishing conditions over two days and if I was to say that the traditional tweed or wax jackets, with labels like breathable, light weight, waterproof, windproof, hoods, etc., offered insufficient protection from such conditions, it would be an understatement. Alan Rountree, five times winner of the championship, recounted what an old friend of his once said of the old style wax jackets: "There is no need to hang it up, it will simply stand up on its own on the kitchen floor to dry." I think it's also true today. Alan had his own dog smartly dressed in a very appropriate dog coat. The freezing driving rain and winds up to 80



Judges for the 2011 Championship - Jimmy Black, Stephen Hartley, Martin Rush and Martin Fitzgerald.

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John T. Malone, Lady Waterford, P.J. Hearne, Lady Sheila Goff, David Boyce and Jim Perry.

about the estate and the drives used for the trial. Keith was head keeper at Ballincor for 15 years and although he retired only a few years ago, he is still keen to assist the shoot on important days. He reminisced about the big bag days during his time when, for 15 years, the Swedes came to Ballincor to shoot some of the largest bags in the country. One American from that original group, although based in Chicago, continues the tradition today and he has shot Ballincor for 20 consecutive years considering it to be the finest sporting bird shoot in the country.

The I.K.C. Championship Running Order

kilometres per hour made proceedings uncomfortable, particularly for the spectators who turned up in good numbers. These were the kind of conditions which would make you want to head for the nearest fireside in a local hostelry and a warm drink, but not for the hardy spectators and dogs lovers who always support this event.

The Ballincor shooting syndicate who shot on day one and the Goff family members and friends who shot on day two deserve our utmost appreciation and thanks, and I only have the highest of praise for their skill and marksmanship under such conditions in supplying sufficient birds for this stake. John Pickard, Head Keeper and his beating team worked so hard to drive the birds over the pegs, many travelling at over 80 kilometres per hour with a numbing wind at their tails. The sight of such fast birds using the wind to glide high and 'shimmy' to the nearest wood was remarkable. Well done John.

The wind was so bad that Lady Waterford was overheard to say to David Boyce: "If I had an umbrella, I could be Mary Poppins." This lovely lady and hard working Treasurer of the IKC championship committee would be a sight to behold drifting across the skies over the beautiful Vale of Avoca singing 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.' I know you're all trying to say it now and you won't be able to get it out of your head for days! Anyway, enough about the weather but remember as I attempt to describe the retrieves the dogs probably had difficulty in hearing the whistle and handler error contributed to an early hot 'shower' for many dogs and handlers alike. Many excellent dogs did not get a chance to show us their true potential as they left the stake early and others did not have an opportunity to do anything special. But the conditions were the same for all.

The Judges were Jimmy Black, a very experienced A panel judge and one of the most successful handlers in the Republic. He was appointed senior judge for the proceedings, ably assisted by three A panel judges who were judging the championship for the first time, Stephen Hartley, Marty Rush, and Martin Fitzgerald. I would like to thank Jimmy for inviting me to join him and his fellow judges in the Land Rover transportation during the two days and to Keith Woodridge for driving us and giving such an interesting commentary

It has always been my policy to list the names of the handlers and dogs running in the championship. I feel that they have achieved such good success in open trials during the year and irrespective of how they do on the day here, they warrant inclusion in my report. Alan Nolan from Mullingar qualified this year for the first time and deserves a mention. Below is a list of the handlers, dogs, all Labradors, sex, and running number. The only female handler qualified was Birgitta Staflund-Wibers from Sweden who was made most welcome. She based herself in Ireland for some months to compete in local trials to gain qualification for this event and she put up a good fight. This is the kind of commitment and interest shown in the IKC Championship.

- 1 Matthew Lambden with F.T. Ch. Willowmount Ricky. BD
- 2 Alan Leonard F.T. Ch. Ffynongain Graphic. YB
- 3 Ian Davis F.T. Ch. Glenanne Faith. BB
- 4 Alan Nolan Wild Boy Oscar. BD
- 5 John O' Connor F.T. Ch. Hazel of Red Bog BB
- 6 A C M Rountree GB. F.T. Ch. Waterford Galahad of Tasco. BD
- 7 Nigel Carville Astraglen Faith BB
- 8 Paul Toal F.T. Ch. Altiquin Ripple YD
- 9 Matthew Lambden Kilmona Jodi BB



Hannika Simons, Lady Sheila Goff, Lady Waterford & P.J. Hearne. Lady Goff kindly came to meet and greet everyone on arrival at Ballinacor Estate.



Kieran Murphy reporter for the 2011 Championship chatting with Elywn McIlwaine.

- 10 William Higginson Int. F.T. Ch. Ferncott Quester. BD
- 11 John Behan Quarry Rough Diamond. BD
- 12 Birgitta Dtaflund-Wiberg DK and SW F.T.Ch. Bierspool Blackbill of Lakedown. BD
- 13 Damian Newman Dunamoira Eve. BB
- 14 Paul O' Brien Corrib Mafi BD
- 15 John O' Connor Holly of Red Bog BB
- 16 Michael Cronin Watergreen Gemma of Monsell YB
- 17 Nigel Carville Int. F.T. Ch. Marranscar Blackcap. BD
- 18 Ivan Lee F.T. Ch. Astraglen Blue BB

- 19 Roy Rankin F.T. Ch. Astraglen Fergie. BD
- 20 Ronnie Farrelly F.T. Ch. Glenloch Essien. BD
- 21 Anthony Reilly F.T. Knockshan Emma BB
- 22 Thomas Brady F.T. Ch. Copperbirch Zeus of Glenanne. BD
- 23 Thomas Hughes F.T. Ch. Apache Joe BD
- 24 Danny Behan Quarrypool Ainey BB
- 25 Sean Moore Tweedshot Trimble of Lettergreen YD
- 26 Sean Diamond Gibbstown Vintage BD
- 27 Gary Mc Cutcheon Altiquin Rain of Camgart YB
- 28 John Hartigan Rockenhart Discovery BD
- 29 David Kelly Rainbow in the Dark BD
- 30 Keith McNamara F.T. Ch. Clara of Lurriga. BB

On the morning of the first day, we were informed that 4 dogs would not be running, number 13, 26, 27 and 28. This leaves 26 dogs taking part in this year's championship. Two Judges, Jimmy Black and Martin Rush both had dogs qualified but obviously could not run.

Day One 1st Drive - Kelly's Diamond.

Situated approximately midway on the Ballincor Mountain it is one of the highest drives on this 4,200 acre estate. The dogs were lined out facing the guns in a field of large tight clumps of white grasses with drainage holes everywhere, many filled with heathers. A small pond in the lower right hand corner was soon to be brought into play and a number of Laurel bushes dotted the area and gave perspective. On the left side of the field was a small boundary wall and fence with reeds and light cover at the base stretching into the field.

Judges Jimmy Black and Stephen Hartley took the odd numbers as is customary and decided to remain at the top end of the field while Martin Fitzgerald and Marty Rush took the even numbers to the lower part of the field which overlooked the small pond and was surrounded by a boggy patch of heavy grassland and reeds. It was hard going in this area and good handling was essential. Pat Hearne very kindly assisted me with the information on the performance of the dogs in the even line while I remained with the odd numbered dogs.

First shot fired and it was leads off

Unfortunately we lost one dog during the drive, dog No 14 and he was the first to go in championship 2011. No 2 retrieved

First drive in the Championship in gale force wind.





High on a Wicklow hillside Judge Martin Rush gives a mark to Ivan Lee.

from the small pond and No 4 Wild Boy Oscar, handled by Alan Nolan in his first championship unfortunately didn't find and was called up. No 6 Mr Alan C. Rountree with GB. F.T.Ch. Waterford Galahad of Tasco started his round well and had a good retrieve from water while No 8 retrieved well from land in the same area. No 10 Int. F.T.Ch. Ferncott Quester handled by Willie Higginson, last years champion and very fancied dog, had difficulty and was called up. Number 12 was next up and she was given the mark by judge, Martin Fitzgerald. After good work she had a find and as a result eye wiped dog no.10, good work Birgitta. Dogs 16 and 18 had good retrieves and Nos 20 and 24 both retrieved well from water. Numbers 22 and 30 each had a good retrieve from land. Numbers 26 and 28 were non runners.

Judges Black and Hartley were simultaneously sending the odd numbers line and the wind was blowing hard into the faces of the handlers and dogs. Three handlers, Messrs, Lambden, Carville and O'Connor each had two dogs under their supervision. Dog No 1 handled by Matthew Lambden failed to get to the area and was called up. Dog No 3 F.T.Ch. Glenanne Faith was given the same mark and made a good retrieve. Dog No 5 F.T.Ch. Hazel of Red Bog moved forward at the request of the judge, Stephen Hartley, who was sending the dogs at this stage. Hazel, handled by John O'Connor worked the area well and returned with the bird although she adjusted a few times on the way back. Number 7 Astraglen Faith handled by Nigel Carville with his first of two qualified dogs was sent to the same area and straight out and back with a hen bird. Number 9 the second dog handled by Lambden was sent and retrieved a hen bird well. Number 11 was out and back with a cock bird with a small bit of handling. Number 13 was



John O'Connor sends F.T. Ch. Hazel of Red Bog on a retrieve.

a non runner. Number.15 was straight out and back. Number 17 Int. F.T.Ch. Marranscar Blackcap was Nigel's second dog and despite good work failed to find and was called up, another of the favourites now gone. Number 19 handled by Roy Rankin had a good find and returned promptly with a hen bird. Number 21 F.T.Ch. Knockshan Emma had a good find on a cock bird. Thomas Hughes Jnr. was sent for a bird and his area was a Laurel bush. He hunted the area well but failed to find. He was followed by dog No 25 and he too was sent for the elusive bird but he also failed to find and was called up. The spectators looked on and this was a nery time for the two handlers. The judges decided to go forward to look for the bird but after a good search, no bird was found and both dogs were back in. Number 23 F.T.Ch. Apache Joe was sent to the left of the field into reeds close to a boundary wall and duly obliged and returned with a hen bird, making Mr. Hughes a happy boy. Number 25 Tweedshot Trimble of Lettergreen, a nice big yellow dog handled by Sean Nolan was sent to a parallel position for a bird lying at the edge of the pond in the reeds. He took a cock bird from the area and it was happy days for Nos 23 and 25 who were back in the game and going well. No 27 was a non runner and so No 29 was sent for the next bird. In the heavy wind the dog went about his work well but regretfully he failed to find and was called up.

We were now joined by the even numbers who survived the first retrieve and word was coming through that we could expect a number of surprises. Number 2 Alan Leonard's F.T.Ch. Ffynongain Graphic was the first dog to join us from the even numbed line was sent for his second retrieve of the day for a bird along a fence. He had a good find and appeared to be going well. Number 4 was gone and No 6 had a good retrieve and Alan Rountree seemed pleased. Number 8 had a good retrieve. Number 10, last year's Champion, was eliminated on his first retrieve and we were disappointed not to see him challenge for his third title in a row. Number12 Swedish F.T.Ch. Bierspool Blackbill of Lakedown was up next and it was reported that she had an eye wipe from her first retrieve over the reigning champion. She commanded her dog in English which I thought was interesting. The dog appeared to go out straight but Birgitta stopped the dog and proceeded to cast him back and he failed to get to the area straight away. Unfortunately after some handling the dog did eventually return with a hen bird from the reeds but the damage was done. She was not to be brought forward to the next round and a potential award winner was gone. Numbers



Thomas Brady F.T. Ch. Copperbirch Zeus of Glenanne completes water retrieve.



Jim Perry (Chairman) at the 'top table' starts the presentation.

16 and 18 were called up. Ronnie Farrelly, with dog No 20 FTCh Glenloch Essien, the retriever of the year, wrong birded and was gone. This young dog achieved so much in 2010, Ronnie won't be too disappointed. We have now lost many of the fancied dogs already and it was all to play for as far as the remaining dogs were concerned. All the suitable birds were now used and the judges decided to go to the next drive.

Drive 2 - Rookery.

To finish the round, judges Black and Hartley needed to see dogs Nos 22, 24, and 30 and each was sent through a grass field into a wood from about 80 metres and all had a good find. Judges Marty Rush and Martin Fitzgerald still had to see the remaining odd numbers and here is the report on them. Numbers 3 and 5 had good retrieves, No 7 had a good retrieve out of the wood, No 9 retrieved with assistance from the handler. Numbers 11,15,19,21 all had good retrieves. Numbers 23 and 25 did very good work. This completed round 1 and it was now time for the judges to confer and consult their books and bring forward the dogs for round 2.

Round 2

After due deliberation the judges called forward 16 dogs to continue in the championship, dogs numbered 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 30. The four judges were now working together and the dogs were called to retrieve in numerical order.



Lady Goff presents Anthony Reilly with one of the many trophies for Winning the 2011 I.K.C. Retriever Championship.

Dog No 2 F.T.Ch. Ffynongain Graphic handled by Alan Leonard was sent 80 metres to an area covered with bracken and small trees in the middle of an open grassy field halfway towards a large wood. He soon returned with a hen bird. Next up was dog No 3 F.T.Ch. Glenanne Faith who was straight out and back from bracken although he dropped the bird for adjustment several times. Number 5 was ok. Alan Rountree with F.T.Ch. Waterford Galahad of Tasco sent his dog to the bracken, however he seemed a little slow to react when the dog pulled to the left of the area and it entered at what seemed to be the wrong point and came out with a hen bird. He was asked to stand by while Nigel Carville was given the same area and although needing some assistance he did come out of the correct area with a hen bird thereby

eliminating dog No 6. Number 8 had a straight forward retrieve from a bracken patch in middle of the field. Number 9 Kilmona Jodi had a good 80 metre retrieve to the edge of the field and returned at pace. Number 11 made a good retrieve from a nearby wood. Number 15 went towards the wood and collected a hen on the edge, a good retrieve. Number 19 was sent for a bird sitting up in the grassy field at the edge of the wood and following a few correction he collected and returned at pace. Number 21 F.T.Ch. Knockshan Emma, handled by Anthony O'Reilly, was sent by Judge Martin Fitzgerald for a bird across the grassy field and collected well and returned at pace with a hen bird. Good retrieve and starting to look good. Number 22 F.T.Ch. Copperbirch Zenus of Glenanne handled by Thomas Brady was straight out and back with a bird from the open field. Number 23 was sent down the field over a small wall and had a quick find and returned at pace. Number 24 Danny Behan out and back. Number 25 had a good retrieve at pace. Number 30 was out of the area and worked hard and got a bird from the open field but it was to prove to be the wrong bird and subsequently would have no further part in the championship. Another round was now completed and the judges moved to a new area with the dogs selected to run in the next round.

Round Four

Number 2 was first up and collected a bird from the wood,



Mrs. Lillian Jennett presents Anthony Reilly with the Sam Jennett Raughlin Trophy for the breeder of the winning dog, accepted on behalf of Mr. John Flannery.



Lady Goff presents Ian Davis with his 2nd place award.



Lady Goff presents Tommy Hughes with 3rd Prize.



Kate Murphy Flynn presents Thomas Brady with the Barra Flynn Memorial Trophy.



Lady Goff presents Sean Nolan with Diploma of Honour.

as did No 3. Number 5 went in at the wrong area but did find and returned with a hen bird. Number 7 collected a bird in the open grassy field on the edge of the area and returned at pace. The judges' accepted the bird. Numbers 8 and 9 retrieved well from the same area. Number 11 raced out into the wood and immediately returned with a hen bird and was looking good at this stage. Numbers 15 and 19 good retrieves from wood and 21, 23, and 25 were all sent into the wood and all returned with a bird. Two judges had a good position in the wood to observe the dog's working out of sight.

End of Day 1

The judges got together and considered matters and announced that they had seen enough for day one and said thirteen dogs were needed for day two these being Nos 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23 and 25. It was now off to the Amber Springs Hotel, Gorey and H.Q. for the two days for a hot shower and a bite to eat.

Day 2

We gathered in the yard and dogs, handlers, markers and spectators were preparing to set off on the tractors and trailers

to the drive. The run order and numbers were called again to facilitate the new gallery which despite the weather turned up in good numbers. Pat Hearne called out the numbers and asked that the handlers with dogs board the transportation quickly, Nos 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 1, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23 and 25.

The morning started off dry but soon changed and IKC Committee Chairman Jim Perry seemed happy and broke into song and was heard to sing to Alan Leonard 'Don't dilly dally on the way,' as he tried to shepherd Alan to the transport for moving to the First Drive, Flemings, named after one of the previous owners of the estate.

Drive 1 - Flemings

Thirteen dogs sat through the drive which lasted about 30 minutes and all four Judges were together and looking closely to identify the dogs with pace and style and requiring the minimum amount of handling. This after all was the championship and only the best deserve to stand on the winner's podium. Number 2 was sent into light cover at the top of the field and duly returned with a hen bird, a good retrieve and going well at this stage. Number 3 F.T.Ch. Glenanne Faith was sent for a bird inside a gate and retrieved



Mrs. Christine McGuirk presents Alan Leonard with the Frederick McGuirk Perpetual Cup for the most stylish competing yellow Labrador bitch in the Championship.

without trouble. Number 5 was sent for a bird sitting up in top corner of the field and made an excellent retrieve to hand. Number 7 was sent for a bird up a pathway and beyond a gate and despite searching both side of the area, no bird was found. The judges tried dogs Nos 8 and 9 but without success. Nothing more to do, the judges went forward to look for the bird and gave the area a good 'thrashing.' No bird was found and all three dogs were back in. Handlers and dogs were asked to move up the sloping grass field and No 7 Astraglen Faith, handled by Nigel Carville was sent back down for a bird sitting close to an entrance gate and near the spectators. He pulled to the left and continued to search over and back over a small dry stone wall and was obviously onto something but not necessarily the bird the Judges requested, wrong bird and gone. Number 8 F.T.Ch. Altiquin Ripple handled by Paul Toal was sent for a bird at the gate and after some hard work and handling the dog did retrieve the cock requested. Number 9 Kilmona Jodi was sent for bird at the bottom of the field beside a small gallery of spectators and with a little assistance from the handler, returned with a bird and a good retrieve. John Behan was next up and going well with Quarry Rough Diamond. This black dog went out at speed and with little difficulty found his bird and returned with style, good retrieve. He was surly looking good after a number of classy retrieves. Number 15 was sent to the corner of the field towards a small wood but broke left and wrong birded. Number 19 F.T.Ch. Glenloch Essien handled by Roy Rankin had a good retrieve up the grassy hill in open ground. Numbers 21 and 22 had nice out and back retrieves at speed. We moved to a new area into a cover crop in a large pen. Dogs Nos 5 and 8 were sent for a bird in the crop but failed to get to the area and there was disappointment for John O'Connor and Paul Toal. Dog No 9 did all right. Numbers 11, 19, and 21 were all tried on a further

bird in the crop but failed to find and the judges searched the area and they too could not find the bird. All three were back in. We moved to the next drive to start a fresh round.

Drive 2 - Gort Na Gaoithe

This is probably the most outer drive and close to the boundary of the estate and we had to pass Kelly's Diamond and Raheen to get there. Heavy rain and mist was rolling down the Wicklow hillside in front of us. We could see it was going to get bad and knew we needed protection from the elements. This drive is not called the 'windy place' for nothing, I assure you. The spectators had little cover to shelter under and only the hope of seeing something special was keeping spirits high. We were now down to eight dogs and they were lined out in run order Nos 11, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 9 and 3.

The drive had hardly started when a lightly pricked hen bird ran across the open field in front of the line. First up was dog no 11 handled by John Behan and he was sent for the runner but both handler and dog failed to mark and seemed a tad slow to react. The dog

didn't pick up on the scent, perhaps due to the heavy wind and he was called up and one of my fancied dogs was gone.

The drive was now over and the judges decided to leave the open field and go to a large pen situated behind the line where the markers had identified a number of birds. On the way to the pen the judges saw a bird inside the gate and wanted it picked before going on. Number 19 F.T.Ch. Astraglen Fergie handled by Roy Rankin, who in my book was going very well at this stage, was called in to retrieve the bird inside the gate of the grass field but he arrived at the point without his dog. Careless on the handler's part, but the judges did give him a mark on the bird sitting up on the grass inside the gate. The dog was cast in what appeared to be in a very casual way and its outrun was very fast and took him beyond the gate, continuing up a path. Much handling followed. A great opportunity for this good dog to shine was gone and although he did get the bird it was too late to hope to go further in the competition. Number 21 now sent for a bird in the pen over a small ditch some 40 metres away through light cover. The dog duly obliged with a good retrieve. Number 22 had a good find in the pen at 50 metres. Number 23 was sent to the same area over a small drain and had a good retrieve. Number 25 was called forward for a bird on the edge of a small pond. The bird was on the narrow side at the base of a silver Birch tree, up through bracken and tufts of thick grasses and with a tempting gate to go through on the left. No need for concern and this dog was looking good to be in the awards if only he could hold it together. All the birds were now collected in the pen and for convenience sake the judges decided to use the available pond for the mandatory water test.

Water test

Six dogs were called forward Nos 3, 9, 21, 22, 23 and 25 and

all retrieved from the water without a problem. This was not the end of the trial however as the judges decided to bring all six dogs back into the open field to have another look, perhaps to sort out the lower places.

Final round

Dog No 3 F.T.Ch. Glenanne Faith was sent 70 metres for a bird lying approximately three metres from the perimeter fence at the edge of the pen and the dog duly obliged with a good retrieve. Number 21 F.T.Ch. Knockshan Emma had a good retrieve and No 9 Kilmona Jodi found a cock and was good. Number 22 casually cast his dog and he broke to the left and following a lot of work he got him back to the area but did not find. Number 23 was tried on the same bird and the dog unfortunately went through a small gate in the fence and out of the area. The handler did eventually get him back to the area but failed to find and was called up. The judges were convinced that there was a bird in the area and moved forward to look but could not find. Number 22 F.T.Ch. Copperbirch Zeus of Glenanne was back in and did an 80 metre straight out and back retrieve in the open grass field, good. Number 23 F.T.Ch. Apache Joe handled by Thomas Hughes Jr. was sent 60 metres to retrieve a cock bird in the grass field and delivered well to hand. Number 25 Tweedshot Trimble of Lettergreen handled by Sean Nolan had an excellent cast although over running the bird slightly and needing a slight correction. This good going dog used the wind effectively and returned with the bird safely. The judges had by now seen enough and announced the trial was over, so it was back for dry clothes and a drink in the Meeting of the Waters bar and restaurant, Avoca, for the presentations and to hear Mr Pat Hearne announce the results.

Results

The Chairman Mr Jim Perry thanked all involved particularly Lady Goff and her team at Ballincor. He went on to point out that Jon and Richard Binley of Massbrook Pet Food were substantial sponsors of the championship over many years and called on everyone to support them in buying the Massbrook line of dog food, suitable for even the most discerning champion's palate. Other thanks and pleasantries were exchanged including a presentation to Sir Robert and Lady Goff our most generous hosts. Jim congratulated Keith Mathews for producing a great DVD of last year's championship and said he couldn't wait to see this year's production. He announced that plans for 2012 were already underway and that the championship will be held at Drumbanagher Shooting Estate near Newry, Co. Down.

The results were announced as follows by Pat Hearne, Hon. Secretary:

1st No. 21 F.T.Ch. Knockshan

Emma handled and owned by Anthony O'Reilly.

2nd No. 3 F.T.Ch. Glennane Faith handled and owned by Ian Davis.

3rd No. 23 F.T.Ch. Apache Joe handled and owned by Thomas Hughes.

4th No 22 F.T.Ch. Copperbirch Zeus of Glenanne handled and owned by Thomas Brady

The winning trophy sponsored by Albert Titterington and the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine was presented to the winner by Lady Goff. All winners and judges will receive a year's subscription to the magazine. Mrs. Kate Murphy-Flynn presented the Barra Flynn Memorial trophy to 4th place.

Diplomas of Merit

Dog no 25 Tweedshot Trimble of Lettergreen handled by Sean Nolan

Dog no 9 Kilmona Jodi handled by Matthew Lambden.

Special Awards

Dog no 9 was the Guns Choice and received the Irish Countrysports and Country Life Perpetual Trophy

The Freddie McGuirk Perpetual cup went to the most stylish yellow bitch, No 2 F.T.Ch. Ffynongain Graphic, handled by Alan Leonard and it was presented to Alan by Mrs. Christine Mc Guirk.

Breeders Award went to J Flannery who bred the winner and the Sam Jennett Raughlin Trophy was presented by Mrs. Lillian Jennett.

Alan Nolan was recognised for competing in his first championship.

The winners rightly basked in the glory of winning and the warm glow of success was evident on the face of Anthony Reilly, the winner from Finnea, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. For the rest of us it was home as soon as possible for a hot bath and a sip of something warm.



Lady Goff presents Matthew Lambden with the Irish Country Sports and Country Life Salver for the award of 'Guns Choice'.

Judging Ireland's impact on the 2011 Retriever Championship

Thanks to David Ross's kind invitation new horizons beckoned for the International Gundog League when it went to his open and undulating estate at Nevill Holt in Leicestershire on 5, 6 and 7 December for the 2011 Retriever Championship. His determination to support organisations such as the IGL found its expression in Headkeeper Jim Chattaway's peerless preparation. Countless stops and helpers ensured a spectacular show of game even though a strong and bitterly cold wind was always more in evidence than not. No wonder the smile never left his face. This was a testing job brilliantly well done. The same might be said of the winner. The 2011 Retriever Champion is Keith Broomfield's black Labrador dog Kaliture Black Spruce and, in securing the coveted Captain A Glen Kidston Challenge Trophy with consistently clean work in exacting conditions, he improved spectacularly on the Diploma of Merit he took at Blankney in 1999 with FTCh Westlands Charlie. He qualified the sire of the 2011 Retriever Champion, FTCh Maverick's Goose, in 2006 and again in 2007 and ran his yellow dog FTCh Noiroche Aperitif in 2008 and 2009. So this was no unheralded victory by a man who, as Field Trial Secretary of the Hampshire Gundog Society, makes the most vital of contributions to the sport he loves.



Keith Broomfield with the 2011 Retriever Champion, FTCh Kaliture Black Spruce, and the Glen Kidston Challenge Trophy.

The varied cover crops - principally turnips, fodder kale and rough grass - which had been planted with shooting in mind might have been novel: but the card itself looked strikingly familiar. Indeed, no fewer than 20 of the 44 runners, which included three golden retrievers and 14 yellows, had run in the Championship before: 16 of them last year. Phil Highfield's FTCh Levenghyl Bee of Featherfly and Sandra Halstead's FTCh Levenghyl Sivercloud of Drakeshead were, exceptionally, running in their fourth Championships with four other dogs making a third successive appearance.

Ireland's impact was both spectral and significant. Spectral because, although Alan Rountree, Nigel Carville, Billy Higginson, as the winner of the 2010 Irish Championship, and Roy Rankin all had the distinction of qualifying, they were unable to run. Significant because, in Alan Rountree's case it was because he was, as senior Judge, exerting a considerable influence on a

(Left): Vicki Pritchard's golden FTCh Vamp Parsley Potage, running at No 1, got the Championship underway before the line had moved forward.



Championship which could so easily have been really difficult.

Of those that did compete, dogs clearly predominated, with 31 of them running as against 13 bitches. Some 31, along with another five amongst those who had qualified but were unable to run, had already achieved their FTCh titles. Of the handlers, 26 were men and 18 women. Twelve of the dogs had been whelped in 2005, of which - by a matter of days - Ann Fauld's Abbotsross Jet of Warroch was the eldest, and 15 in 2008. The youngest competitor who was there at the last to take a Diploma of Merit in a trial where survival was the first imperative, was Philippa William's yellow bitch Tweedshot Thistle of Levenghyl who was born in April 2009. The most prominent sire was FTCh Greenbriar Viper of Drakeshead whilst, amongst bitches, it was FTCh Glenpatrick Eve again with four of her progeny having qualified.

John Halsted again had the distinction of qualifying three dogs and Helena Sully, by winning both the IGL and the Barton on Humber Open Stakes, had qualified two. The number of dogs running was reduced somewhat by the distinction of some, for Vicki Prichard, Billy Steel Snr, and Carol Clarke had qualified twice over whilst Heather Bradley had, remarkably, won three two day stakes with FTCh Heathergaye Hundall. Both Richard Hinks and Phil Parkins had, meanwhile, demonstrated the sort of consistency which gains three B qualifications. Add to that the seven qualified dogs which were not running and the card might have been much larger.

Two of the seven had been qualified by Alan Rountree (a winner in 1993), who was exercising his judging acumen on the right of the line with Jayne Coley, and Billy Steel (winner in both 1996 and 2000) who was paired with Roger Phillips on



John Halsted takes a bird from Cherry Finlan's FTCh Cherwood Ace of Spades who came second, having also finished second in 2009.



Kirsty Cousins' golden FTCh Gortons Red Ruby Rascal retrieves to hand watched by Linda Partridge with FTCh Braidenvale Spinnaker (fourth) and Judge Roger Phillips.



Jamie Bettinson, who won a Diploma of Merit with FTCh Whitesmiths Widgeon, watches a bird away.



(Above): A cock bird for Carol Clarke from FTCh Adoraden Izzy of Greenbriar, who was awarded a Diploma of Merit.



(Left): Sheer delight. Samantha Rowe took third place with Fernshot Optimist of Driftaway.

(Below): L to R Judges Alan Rountree, Billy Steel, Jayne Coley and Roger Phillips managed a challenging Championship brilliantly.



the left. Their long deliberations were testament to the fact that this was a Championship in which scenting conditions meant that it had to be done 'on the books'. Indeed, there was never a moment when the large gallery broke into applause and only excellent shooting, which made for very few runners, kept the grief within bounds. Even so, the challenge of the conditions cut a great swathe through the card in the first round when twice over the Judges walked out and picked up undemanding retrieves which had defeated the best efforts of four very capable dogs.

Black Dyke

On a bright and sunny first morning, with a bitter wind gusting across the frozen ground, four retrieves were completed before the line moved forward. Then, at the end of the field, a bird across the hedge and a wide and deep ditch presaged the mayhem which would follow. Two dogs failed and the Judges did not find either. There were many hares in the next field and, after a while as the line paused, a bird was shot which fell twenty feet behind the left of the line. Charlie Halliday with FTCh Craighorn Pete and Sandra Halstead's bitch, 3rd, 4th and 3rd in the previous three years, sent from the right could make nothing of it so Dave Brown and Graham Cox were taken up with an eyewipe on a bird that had fallen directly behind them surely in prospect. It was not to be. Though right for the wind neither dog got even a hint of scent and it was left to the Judges to lift the bird and eliminate all four.

Shortly after, with the frost coming out of the ground, a rabbit in front in the centre wreaked similar havoc with all four dogs in line, including Phil Parkin's FTCh Twixwood Shooting Star of Fernshot who had picked a superb runner in 2009, unable to make anything of it. Again, the Judges had no difficulty

in picking a retrieve which one dog had been visibly standing over at one point. Scent, this seemed to confirm, was well nigh impossible.

A long lunch, courtesy of the generosity of sponsors Skinners, was welcome and when work resumed in white grass at 1.45 pm it did not last longer than was needed to complete the first round. 'Stumps were drawn' soon after 2.00 with 27 survivors and, of those who had fallen, only one had succumbed to a first dog failure: testament to consistently fine shooting.

Holyoaks

With conditions unchanged - cold air and cold ground - the context for work in the second round was demanding. Scent is always crucial and when that context offers no support at all struggles are frequent and relief becomes a dominant emotion. In such circumstances the approach taken by Judges is critical and these responded positively. It would be hard to imagine a more mobile Judge than Billy Steel or a more experienced one than Alan Rountree: so communication up and down the line was good and every assistance was given to indicate the location of retrieves.

Even so, there were inevitable difficulties. Not for Keith Broomfield though. And when Mike Brown's Longcopse Bertie failed on a partridge behind the line Kaliture Black Spruce went unerringly to it in bright sunshine and, shortly after, he picked a bird off the end of the line well. Gwen Butcher with Yettolley Maple failed in front and neither Jamie Bettinson, who followed, nor the Judges could find. Lengthy deliberations confirmed the expected decision. Tess Lawrence, meanwhile, did very tidy work on a hen pheasant to the left and John Halsted secured an eyewipe with FTCh Emmanygan Rocket of Chatsworth after Ricky Moloney's Dovepark Hawk of Ribblesdale had got 'behind the line' on the edge of the crop.

Work after a mini drive was significant, and a further indication of the exacting conditions. David Latham's defending 2010 Champion, FTCh Delfleet Neon of Fendawood, sent from the right for a hen behind the line, raced to little effect. But Billy Steel's FTCh Copperbirch Paddy of Leadburn, though he did the fall area, could not pick and it was Carol Clarke's FTCh Adoraden Izzy



Headkeeper Jim Chattaway reflecting on a job well done.

at Greenbriar, taken up from the left, who went deeper and secured a good eyewipe.

Another mini drive saw two partridges dropped close to each other. Chris Winfield's Jobeshill Valfrid of Avonford overran and Philippa William's young bitch made short work of the eyewipe with an excellent mark. Then, sent for the remaining one Colin Maddison's Yarrow Georgio of Claybeck, winner of the South West Scotland Gundog Association Open, settled into a superb and utterly classic display of controlled hunting. Holding the ground and working without handler assistance the five year old dog eventually succeeded with the best work that the Championship would see. Unfortunately a first dog failure later in the afternoon snuffed out his challenge.

Twenty dogs faced two more retrieves in the third round. Keith Broomfield had a tidy one with a good partridge behind and another over a boundary fence. The, just before lunch, John Halsted with Cherry Finlan's FTCh Cherwood Ace of Spades, second in 2009, did good work on a cross line partridge over a fence. The handler was unsighted and it might have run, but an excellent mark made light of a demanding retrieve,

Work in the early afternoon demonstrated, if we needed reminding, that scent was barely serving. First Diane Harrison and then Samantha Rowe were tried on a partridge behind which landed in the gallery and ran immediately towards the wood sixty yards distant. There was some delay as the gallery parted, but neither dog acknowledged the fall leave alone own the line. Billy Steel picked the bird at the edge of the wood, but the Judges generously decided that advice that the bird had run into the wood might have wrongfooted the handlers.

John Halsted did pick a hen runner with FTCh Emmanygan Rocket of Chatsworth. But the bird had sat up in front of the dog in an area of sparse cover and the gallery withheld the applause which often concludes the successful working of a line. Samantha Rowe then secured an eyewipe after Diane Harrison's bitch had got out of her ground on a partridge behind. Tess Lawrence's FTCh Jagdens Gander was convincing in the conditions with a cross line partridge behind which he kicked before picking and a clinical collection of a cock

pheasant behind which had been down a long time. With the third round completed by 3.30 some 16 dogs had survived to contest a fourth round of a further two retrieves.

Park Farm

Conditions on the final day were no less difficult. Dark clouds threatened a more sustained downpour, but the high wind kept them moving and, as the morning progressed, the scent seemed a little better. There was good sequence of work with dogs picking without need of handler assistance and Tess Lawrence, in particular, did good work on a live hen which had been down a while. Phil Highfield's experienced dog got amongst live game as it tried to pick a partridge eighty yards out which lifted and flew back towards the line before dropping again. The dog could not regain contact and neither could three others which were tried. He was sent immediately and the Judges did not flinch from the decision. Then, sent from the right to the left Helena Sully's Quabrook Keava ran into a lot of live game and failed. Heather Bradley tried without success and it was the Judges who lifted the partridge. Carol Clarke, meanwhile, clinically registered an eyewipe after Mark Demaine's FTCh Calderhay Adder had run too fast for his nose in such catchy conditions.

It was very blustery indeed as the Judges embarked on a fifth round of a single retrieve and again Tess Lawrence and Philippa Williams impressed with good retrieves behind the line of first a hen pheasant and then a partridge. John Halsted with Rocket and Carol Clarke were both tried on a bird which eluded them as they flat casted in the raging wind. The Judges, however, succeeded and then embarked on the longest of deliberations, poring through their books as they sought to determine the shape of the final drive.

Nine dogs lined out high on one side of a natural

amphitheatre, with the Keepers from Nevill Holt and Yorkshire ranged in a horseshoe in the valley bottom. The shooting and retrieving achieved a marvellous parity as the highest of birds were pulled down time and again and were brought to hand with the minimum of fuss. Jim Chattaway was able to stop the drive as necessary and, with Alan Rountree sending, this was work of a high order. And so a Championship which had never been less than challenging came to an impressive conclusion.

As IGL President Richard Parker was only too pleased to acknowledge, in cold, windy and for the most part scentless conditions, Jim Chattaway had given everyone a lesson in 'how to do it.' The bottomless gratitude of everyone who saw the 2011 Retriever Championship was plainly evident as Emma Pilkington presented the nine hard-earned awards.

Results:

- First Keith Broomfield's Lab d Kaliture Black Spruce
- Second Cherry Finlan's Lab d FTCh Cherwood Ace of Spades (John Halsted)
- Third Samantha Rowe's Lab b Fernshot optimist of Driftaway
- Fourth Linda Partridge's Lab d FTCh Braidenvale Spinnaker

Diplomas of Merit

- Lady Celina Carter's Lab d FTCh Emmanygan Rocket of Chatsworth (John Halsted)
- Jamie Bettinson's Lab d FTCh Whitesmiths Widgeon
- Tess Lawrence's Lab d FTCh Jagdens Gander
- Philippa Williams' Lab b Tweedshot Thistle of Levenghyl
- Carol Clarke's Lab b FTCh Adoraden Izzy of Greenbriar



The guns, keepers all, who shot brilliantly, Jimmy Brough, Paul Evans, Tom Munday, Harry Hawkins, Michael Wearmough, Billy Garrett, Will Watson with Headkeeper Jim Chattaway.

The Kennel Clubs 82nd English Springer Spaniel Championship



Championship Winner Andrew Whitehouse with FTCh Doncaster Star.

The Championship for the 2011 season was held at Wormegay in Norfolk on the 10th, 11th and 12th January 2012. Hosted by kind permission of the Symington family and Tharros Ltd, it was judged by Jon Bailey, Keith Carter, Ian Flint and Ian Openshaw. The Spaniel Club under the Chairmanship of Edward Martin and Hon Sec Liz Russell, ably assisted by the hard working committee members, organised a seamless enjoyable three days. Sponsorship was gratefully received from Calor Gas and Skinners Dog Foods.

A wonderful atmosphere of enjoyment throughout the three days both in the field and later in the hotel bar showed how happily the competitors and spectators appreciated the effort sustained over the year to make such a success of the event.

There was great viewing on the flat

yellow-grassed Poplar woodland strips which simply bulged with game. This was to be an unusual Championship, with no heavy cover to test courage or stamina. There was the dog in full view at all times. Pace and style, ground pattern and steadiness, marking ability with good delivery, all had to be displayed to the nth degree or down went the judges assessment.

Plenty of game in the light grasses and stick piles created chances for dogs to shine, fall by the wayside or for handlers to make mistakes. Short runs with dogs passing game or failing on retrieves caused thirty of the fifty-six runners to be eliminated on the first day.

Sixty-two dogs had qualified for entry, however Judges Jon Bailey had qualified two including the Irish Championship winner and Ian Openshaw one. Last year's winner, Flaxdale Hallie, handled by Robin Young from Northern Ireland was unable to run, as were two other bitches.

Some outstanding runs were seen, only to have a disappointed handler aware of a flaw in the run which reduced the chances of a place to a Diploma of Merit. It was well understood by all that any dog which survived two runs was more than worthy of this recognition.

The award winners were well received by the crowd which gathered for the prize distribution, all of whom had a good idea of who might be in the top places.

Andy Whitehouse kissed his dog Ft. Ch. Doncaster Star after both runs, a gesture which was well



David Lisset with Judge Jon Bailey.

appreciated by those watching. Another kiss was placed on the winner's trophy which was also held aloft. It has to be said that the top dogs must have been very close in the judges marking yet wisely they placed the dogs in discussion rather than by a run-off.

Altogether a great end to the season.

Results

1st - FTCh Doncaster Star - Andrew Whitehouse, 2nd - FTCh Broomfield Rosie - Eddie Scott, 3rd - FTCh Clearmeadow Flash of Countryways - Dave Templar - also Best Dog, 4th - Int FTCh Buccleuch Jazz - The Duke of Buccleuch handled by David Lissett.

Diplomas:

FTCh Woodash Ignition - Dave Rayner FTCh Rytex Rhino - Jim Potter Glanhowy Peach Melba - Alex Badger - also awarded Best Newcomer FTCh Badger of the Valley - Garry Veasey, Helmsway Halo - Ian English, Halaze Oh Boy of Woodash - Dave Rayner,

Int FTCh Skronedale Romulus - Des Donnelly, FTCh Beggarbush Poppit - Ben Randall, Finno Sam of Rowansbourne - Richard Bramwell, Minscafell Blossom - Andy Platt - also Guns Choice FT Ch Rosebay Camille - Aubrey Ladyman, Regal Quest - Aiden Patterson, Edwardiana Blossom - John Edwards handled by Andy Platt.



Ian Symington with Chairman Edward Martin.



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The Ulster Golden Retriever Club Open Stake at Moyola Estate



Dogs at the river at the first drive.

The UGRC Club Open Stake was staged at Moyola Estate, Castledawson on the 10th December by kind permission of Lady Moyola and the guns. Feedwell Animal Foods were the sponsors. As President of the club I have regretted that I have been unable to make the annual trial so generously hosted by Lady Moyola as it usually held on New Year's day. However this year I had no such excuse and indeed my presence was necessary as I was hosting our guest judge Graham Cox from Bath.

I was looking forward to the visit particularly as since my last visit to Moyola when I was running in a trial I had found out that my great grandfather, the local Postmaster and JP, had 'some connection with the estate.'

My last visit had not been totally successful because, although my dog was running well and in the last four dogs, handler error caused him to go out when I tried to intercept a bird in the fast flowing river, by putting him in further down rather than to the fall. The bird got hung up, a bird was shot which fell beside him, and he was out for 'wrong birding.'

It is an interesting coincidence that, when I was



Host Lady Moyola with UGRC Vice Chairman Eugene McGregor.

introduced to keeper John Holmes, he said he had met me before 'some years ago when you were running in a trial and I shot the bird that put you out!'

The day did not have an auspicious start as a meal out in a local restaurant had given me an extremely upset stomach - I think it was the 'prawns that did it!' and, although the day was wonderfully crisp due to a belated cold snap, I wasn't in great order for a 'day in the field.'

When we arrived in the icy gloom of the frozen car park, I learned that Joe Johnston, our FT secretary, had also been struck down by illness, so the trial was in the capable hands of Eugene McGregor, the club Vice Chairman, assisted by Hugh Gates and Thomas Brady from the field trial committee, club secretary Frank Archibald and other club stalwarts such as Roy Rea.

Officials gather in the gloom of a frosty morning.





The judges

Judges for the trial were Graham Cox, Roy Rea, Joe McGivern and Gary Wilson.

The drives begin

The first drive and layout was down by the river, not much flow on this time but icy cold conditions for the dogs, many which entered the water with some style were less enthusiastic a second time.

Lady Moyola joined us at this stage to watch the dog work. A keen handler herself, I was interested to learn of her experiences with her flatcoat and also with a Gordon setter which she passed on to Bill Hosick, only for it to become a famous FT Champion.

On to the second drive and the field, already thinned out, was reduced to four. Marty Rush, Brian Armstrong, Derek McGinley and Gary McCutcheon were all going well. Gary's dog failed on an interesting little retrieve over two sets of wire and into a wood and we were left with three.



Keeper John Holmes (centre) with Eugene McGregor and Hugh Gates.



Dogs and handlers at the second drive.

Lunch was called and, as I felt unable to enjoy the superb hospitality of the estate and guns, I was very glad of a cup of coffee from Frank Archibald.

Temptation strikes

After lunch it was decided that the three dogs would go with the walking gun, who was of course John Holmes. John is renowned for being an excellent shot – in fact when chatting he revealed he had just shot his



Martin Rush with the ultimate winner F.T. Ch. Rumbleton Quicksiler during the trial.

1000th woodcock – and we felt sure the dogs would be well tested for steadiness. So it proved when, on the move, John brought down a high pigeon which fell just behind Derek McGinley's dog. The temptation was too much and we were reduced to two dogs.

Two birds by John down in the river, were enough to separate the dogs with Marty pulling off the smarter retrieve and it was back to the yard for the presentations.

And as for my upset stomach, well it was tested to the full when I learned that Irene, as a special treat for our guest Graham, had arranged for us to attend a Victorian evening in the Cuan Restaurant, in Strangford. The special evenings run by chef owner Peter McErlean are usually superb and this menu looked really special, as he was assisted in drawing it up by food historian Lady Dunleath, from Ballywalter Park.

A superb table groaning under all manner of fine meats including wild boar, goose, pork, lamb, beef, duck



Eugene McGregor and Lady Moyola present the winner with his prize and trophy.

etc followed by an equally good table of vintage desserts was enough to kick start my jaded appetite and Graham certainly appeared to enjoy his several visits to the table!

I am looking forward to Moyola again in 2012 but will definitely forgo the prawns the night before!

Results: 1st Martin Rush's F.T. Ch. Rumbleton Quicksilver, 2nd Brian Armstrong's Brackagh Jazz.



Officials Hugh Gates, Eugene McGregor and Thomas Brady with Lady Moyola and 2nd place Brian Armstrong.

Why Cooperation With Farmers Is Critical



Jim Prentice, Cecil, Rachael and Hannah Nelson and RSPB's Claire Barnett look at yellowhammers on Jim Prentice's farm in Co Down.

With around 80 percent of Northern Ireland under agriculture, it is no wonder the RSPB understands it is critical to work in close cooperation with farmers across the country. "Agriculture is an important part of the landscape and farmers look after that landscape. So for many years, in Northern Ireland, we have understood that the key to successfully looking after the birds that depend on this landscape is working with farmers," says Dr James Robinson, Director, RSPB NI. "The RSPB has always maintained that the aims and objectives of conservation are the same as sustainable agriculture that delivers for farmers, society and wildlife."

The wildlife conservation charity is Europe's largest with over one million members in the UK, of which there are 13,075 in Northern Ireland. It has more than 200 reserves that cover a wide variety of habitat, from sea cliffs to peat bogs. However, despite the very important areas it manages for wildlife, the organisation knows that without the co-operation of wider society, bringing back birds like the corncrake, lapwing and yellowhammer, will be very difficult, if not impossible.

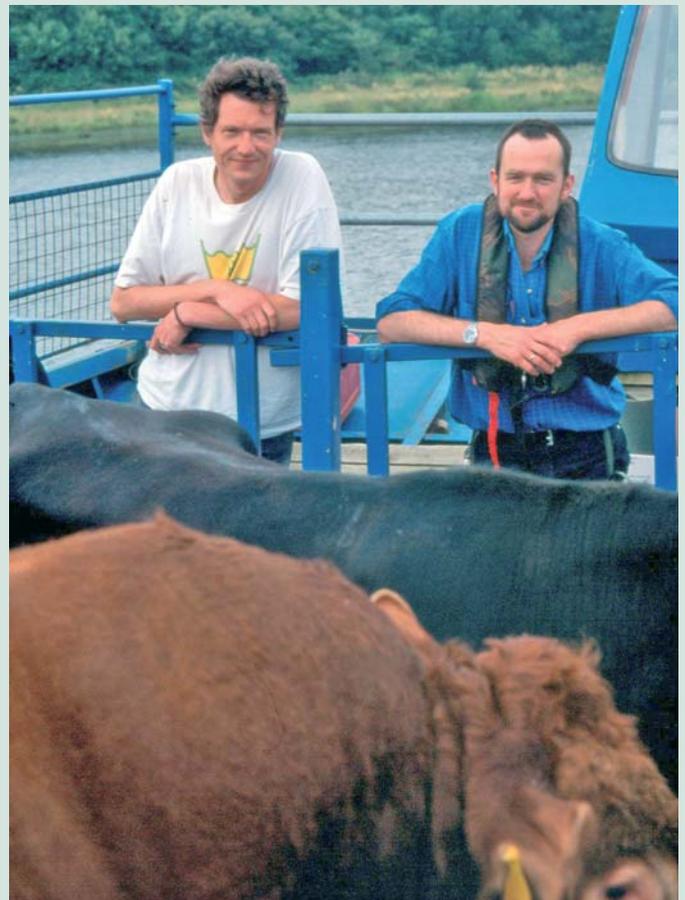
To this end, they have developed a wide range of activities to engage with the agricultural sector, namely farmers and landowners. "The relationship is one of mutual respect and support," said Dr Robinson. "In Northern Ireland especially, many of our staff would

come from farming backgrounds and have families still involved in farming. Some even manage farms themselves. The RSPB is entirely sympathetic to the farmer's perspective."

Farmer's friend

Claire Barnett hails from Co Tyrone, from a family of dairy farmers. She is the Farmland Bird Recovery Officer at the Northern Ireland headquarters. She has a massive remit, from keeping a watching eye over barn owls' nests to advising farmers on how to manage their land for seed-eaters like yellowhammers and trees sparrows.

Claire takes up the story. "I have worked with the RSPB for six years. One of the most important things we do are farm visits. We have several staff on the ground who speak to farmers and provide advice on managing a range of habitats for birds, from upland hill farms through to lowland arable. We also have several initiatives which support the farmer. For instance, there is the Volunteer and Farmer Alliance scheme, where a free and confidential bird survey for farmers is



Brad Robson, RSPB Fermanagh Area Manager and Fionnbarr Cross, RSPB Assistant Warden, on the cattle cot, the only one on Lower Lough Erne.

undertaken by RSPB volunteers. After the survey is complete, they get a map showing the birds on their farm as well as advice on how to help the birds, all with no strings attached.

“Northern Ireland has also won the Nature of Farming Award at the UK level twice! This award aims to promote and celebrate the great work that farmers do for wildlife. The winner is voted by the public, which demonstrates the depth of affection that people have for wildlife and the work that farmers do. It is a pat on the back for the important actions that farmers take to ensure that not only are they able to run successful farms, but also take into account the environment and wildlife.”

The green pound

John Martin is the Land Use Policy Officer at RSPB NI. He spends much of his time speaking to politicians and government officials, submitting responses to consultations and doing research on how sustainable agriculture can benefit everyone. “We support farmers who are in agri-environment options to best manage their land for wildlife and habitats. The RSPB believes this is tax payers’ money well spent, says John.

“When we first began this work more than ten years ago, agri-environment was a complete unknown. Today over 10,000 farmers have taken up this option and there is a waiting list for others to enter the scheme. There are many options which we hope will help birds like the yellowhammer and curlew, and in the future, maybe even the corncrake. Because birds are at the top of the food chain, when they are doing well, it means that other wildlife is also doing well. It is also good news for the public as well as what we call public goods, like water quality, can also be improved by farmers.

“It has also been shown that every £1 spent on agri-environment schemes by the EU, £1.32 is generated locally and £32 nationally. This demonstrates that the money doesn’t just benefit the farmer, but the wider community as well. As the RSPB in Northern Ireland responds to the changes in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), we will be putting both the wildlife and the farmer first, together. We always have and we always will.”

Island life

The RSPB has 10 reserves across Northern Ireland, and working closely with farmers is part of the course on many of them. On Lower Lough Erne, it actually operates the only cattle cot on this section of the Lough. Fionnbarr Cross, Assistant Warden, who has done this for more than ten years explains how it works: “In the past, the islands used to be grazed by cattle that farmers would either swim to the island, or ferry across using



Donnell Black, RSPB with volunteers in Glenarriffe harvesting nettle rhizomes to plant for corncrakes on Rathlin Island.

small wooden cattle cots. However as these cots fell into disrepair, the islands, which were excellent for breeding waders such as redshank, curlew and lapwing – birds that need a short open grassland for nesting – began to scrub up and as a result their numbers fell drastically.

“The RSPB had the 35 ft steel cattle cot built in 1993 which could provide a livestock transport service not only to those islands managed as part of the nature reserve, but to other island owners on the Lower Lough. Livestock grazing is essential to managing the islands to create the right grassland conditions and to keep scrub encroachment in check. This has really improved the numbers of redshank, curlew and lapwing which have made an impressive recovery. As a result, Lower Lough Erne is one of the premier sites for breeding waders in Northern Ireland.

This work would not happen without the co-operation of farmers. It is an excellent example of a symbiotic relationship between the RSPB and farmers, where both benefit from the work of each other.”

High on the hills

On the hills of Antrim, Donnell Black, farmer and Agri-environment Advisor, is gathering nettle rhizomes with RSPB volunteers. These rhizomes will be collected, washed and delivered to Rathlin Island to plant on field boundaries to create early cover for the most elusive and noisy of farmland birds, the corncrake. Now extinct as a breeding bird in Northern Ireland, the RSPB has high hopes that with some help, these summer migrants will re-establish themselves on Rathlin and from there, across the North coast and further afield. “As a farmer myself,” says Donnell, “I have firsthand experience of how wildlife and agriculture can work together. It isn’t just a job – I completely and passionately believe in this. I know that the changes which need to be made to the farming practises to accommodate wildlife actually

benefit husbandry and farm management. In this scenario wildlife wins and the farmer wins. It just seems very straightforward.”

And there is more...

This is really a fraction of the work the Society does with farmers. Futurescapes and the INTERREG funded Halting Environmental Loss Project (HELP), are ambitious projects that promote habitat restoration on a landscape scale. This involves scores of farmers in Northern Ireland, never mind across the UK. The RSPB also arranges meetings with politicians, co-operates with local communities, and visits rural schools to talk to the next generation. The list literally does go on and on.

However there is one species whose return has become associated with the organisation’s presence in the countryside. “When we were looking at reintroducing the red kite to Northern Ireland, we knew that the co-operation of farmers would be first among our concerns,” said Dr Robinson. “We went out and spoke to farmers about the scheme and reassured them that the kites tended to be scavengers, like buzzards. We found them extremely receptive. The successful reintroduction of the kites, and the acceptance of this wonderful bird by local farmers, is seen very visibly in its incorporation in the UFU’s logo. The bird in

silhouette carries the unmistakable forked tail of the red kite.”

To find out more about the work the RSPB go to www.rspb.org.uk or call the Northern Ireland office on 02890491547.



The corncrake and curlew are just two of the birds that are benefiting.

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THE 168 FIREARMS LICENSING CASES BEFORE THE HIGH COURT



The National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC), which supported the recent firearms licensing test cases before the High Court is outraged, but not surprised at the behaviour of Senior Gardai in the operation of the firearms licensing system. Recent revelations in the High Court simply confirm what thousands of firearms licence holders already knew or suspected.



**By Des Crofton,
National Director,
National
Association of
Regional Game
Councils**

In light of the evidence placed before the High Court and the findings of Mr Justice Hedigan in relation to same NARGC now calls for fundamental changes to the licensing system to ensure transparency, fairness and the maintenance of public confidence in the safety and security provisions of the system.

In particular, NARGC calls on the Minister for Justice Equality and Defence to exercise his functions under Section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 by appointing a qualified person to conduct an inquiry into, and report to the Minister, on the manner in which Officers within An Garda Síochána have operated the firearms licensing system. In light of all that has occurred, NARGC must be consulted in setting the terms of reference for such inquiry.

The current system of firearms licensing is seriously flawed, as recognised by the High Court. The wider shooting community have lost all confidence in the Garda Síochána's ability or intention to administer the system in a fair and professional manner.

As a consequence of the revelations in the High Court I consider the Garda Síochána has lost all credibility and cannot be trusted with the licensing system. The NARGC has previously called for a centralised system and we now request yet again, that the Minister establishes a centralised firearms licensing system which comprises the three pillars of the Department of Justice, the Garda Síochána and the Shooting community with independent oversight. This is the only vehicle which is capable of ensuring future legal challenges will be rare. It is also the model used in almost all EU countries where there is no comparable litigation list as has occurred in Ireland.

A massive legal bill for the taxpayer

In the interests of minimising financial exposure for the taxpayer in the future, NARGC also requests that the Minister establishes a non-judicial appeals system, a system which the Association had previously urged on the Minister's predecessors. We note that the Minister has given no indication that he will establish an inquiry as requested by NARGC or that he will centralise the system. The very fact that one of the officers, whose evidence to the High Court gave rise to the extraordinary intervention by Judge Hedigan which effectively prompted the state to settle all cases with a massive legal bill for the taxpayer has subsequently been promoted, speaks volumes for the standards government is prepared to accept for our police force, an institution among all others which should be unquestionably above reproach. Not only have the law abiding taxpayers who happen to be shooting enthusiasts been offended and lost all confidence in the Garda Síochána as an institution, but many decent rank and file Gardai feel let down by their superiors and are just as offended as their fellow citizens in the shooting community. Many are members of the various representative organisations.

Advice about wrongdoing from the apparent wrongdoers while ignoring the victims?

The Minister has confirmed that he has requested a report from the Garda Commissioner. He surely can't be serious in the circumstances? Since when has the state adopted a policy of seeking advice about wrongdoing from the apparent wrongdoers while ignoring the victims? As a response to serious interference in the licensing system and with evidence by senior Gardai, allegedly delegated by the Commissioner to carry out his licensing functions, this must rank among the more bizarre reactions of a Minister for Justice. He obviously has not accepted that, in our opinion, the system would appear to have been contaminated by the Commissioner and his senior officers. Doesn't he yet know that the Garda Commissioner himself has serious questions to

answer in relation to his involvement in this case? For example, he appeared to obstruct the hearing of the test cases by his failure/refusal to comply with High Court orders for Discovery and he refused to comply with directions of the Data Commissioner in relation to providing license holders with information on their applications held by the Garda Síochána to mention but two quite significant matters. The Minister must establish an inquiry under Section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as the only reasonable response to what has occurred. He must also without delay establish a centralised licensing system as the appropriate vehicle for this function and it must have independent oversight.

NARGC is not anti Garda - the problem is the senior ranks

Lest the impression be given that NARGC is anti Garda, let me say this is not the case. We accept and appreciate there are thousands of good and diligent Gardai throughout the country who perform their duties in an exemplary manner. I have repeatedly stated this in the many pieces I have written and I am happy to do so again in this article. Many of these Gardai are good active members of NARGC clubs. Many others are just ordinary members of the communities in which they live

and to which they make valuable contributions. Thousands of them will have been embarrassed by the behaviour of their superiors who seem to be able to operate by different standards as apply to the rank and file if one examines both the Garda Code and the Garda Síochána Act 2005. The problem is the senior ranks, including the Commissioner.

Minister Shatter was previously offered the opportunity to have a full briefing on an off the record basis on the problems as arose in the recent cases, how they might be resolved and how the enormous exposure for the taxpayer could be avoided in the future. He declined that opportunity.

Since the settlement, he has made no effort to engage with NARGC, the pivotal party involved in the recent High Court challenges, on any of these matters and his continued failure to engage will undoubtedly have serious consequences for the future of the licensing system and the taxpayers' further financial exposure.

It has not gone unnoticed that there has been no apology tendered to the license holders whose rights were adversely affected, nor to the taxpayer for the inexcusable waste of public funds. Then again, the Gardai don't do apology.

I believe in the circumstances that I will be back in the High Court with more challenges by the end of March.



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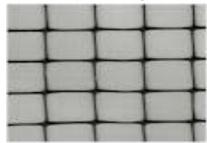
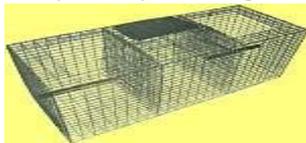








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Hunting Wild Boar in the Belgian Ardennes

It's not everyday that an opportunity comes your way to attend a two-day wild boar hunt in the Ardennes Forest in Belgium, so when one actually presented itself towards the end of last year, arrangements were put in place immediately. In early December I packed my bag and along with rifle and ammunition boarded a Brussels-bound flight at Dublin airport. As this was my first visit to Belgium I was looking forward to seeing the country and particularly the Ardennes region. It was also to be my first wild boar hunt. Temperatures of minus 13 degrees were being forecast, also the possibility of a snowfall, so suitable warm/weatherproof clothing was an imperative.

Following an overnight in a friend's house outside Brussels, we were on the road early the following morning for the 150 Kilometre drive to the Ardennes region. Still in darkness we arrived in the centre of a village, Melliers, to join other members of the hunting syndicate as they breakfasted in the local village hall. This was followed by a pre-hunt safety talk by Monsieur Le President along with a draw for placements and high seats. The hunters gathered in a circle for this little ceremony and then it was off to meet the beaters with their dogs. All of this was totally new to me as I have spent most of my hunting days with one or two companions on the hill or in the forest without any "official" preambles. It was explained that the placements, most with high seats, were spread over a vast tract of forestry and the beaters and dogs would come through the undergrowth directly facing our positions. Driven boar could not be fired on until they had passed the high seat and even then only after they had gone through an angle of 30 degrees to avoid even pointing a rifle in the direction of the next hunter down the line and usually out of sight. All this entailed spotting the running boar, swinging around in an arc without bringing the rifle up to shoot until it was safe to do so. The only possible exception to these stringent rules would be if a running boar was twenty-five



Hunting Lodge in the Ardennes forest.

metres or less directly in front of the placement. A shot could be taken if fired downwards into the boar/ground.

Other factors had to be considered: not to shoot one of the dogs by accident, Roe deer were definitely taboo and while it was mainly a boar hunt, male Red deer could be shot provided that they had less than four crowns on each antler. Female boar accompanied by piglets were not to be shot either. All of this, along with the safety rules was quite a list to digest in such a short space of time and when I was allocated my placement I decided that I wouldn't shoot at any species other than male boar. This decision was conditioned by the fact that I have never actually seen a Roe deer - other than on TV - and I didn't want to make an ass of myself by shooting one, or the wrong Red deer, even one of the dogs. Despite the cold and the forecast it didn't snow. It had rained all night instead. Everywhere was damp, slippery and cold!

Hunting horns echoed through the forest announcing that the drive was about to commence. I checked the readiness of my .375 rifle and ammunition - 300 grain solid rounds - all the way from South Africa. It was at least twenty minutes before the cacophony of barking dogs, loud calls and hunting horns drew close enough to warrant an increased level of alertness. A very large boar appeared suddenly approximately 100 metres out in front of the high seat, loping along at his convenience. He just didn't seem to be too impressed by all the activity coming his way as he trotted out of sight. Perhaps he'd seen it all before.



Frank and Hubert Simons from the Netherlands in the Ardennes Forest.



Placement close to the main road.

Unexpectedly a number of boar crashed through the undergrowth and were gone in a flash although someone on a nearby high seat fired after them. At this point I realised that it was going to be fast and furious if an opportunity was to be taken. Not too long afterwards, a group of four was sent hurtling our way by the dogs and I was ready this time. A number of shots including mine rang out and a boar tumbled, leaving me free to find another target. So it went for the morning, fast and furious indeed. It later transpired that Monsieur le President and I both had the same boar in our sights on the first run.

At midday lunch was served in a hunting lodge deep in the forest. It comprised soup and a hot meal accompanied by a modest glass of wine. Hunters worldwide have rather similar interests – the conversation over lunch centred on hunting, rifles, ammunition and all those important subjects that go to make a thoroughly enjoyable occasion. Unfortunately my French was not sufficiently up to speed to enable me understand the entire conversation. With lunch over we departed for an entirely different area and were allocated new high seats. The afternoon passed much the same as had the morning – long periods of frozen boredom occasionally interrupted by a few seconds of rapid fire at boar racing through the undergrowth. All too soon dusk fell and we headed back to the lodge to complete the usual record forms – species seen, number of shots fired, etc., after which we headed in darkness to a nearby village where we were to stay overnight. That evening we dined in a decent restaurant in another village twenty minutes drive away.

Waiting for any boar that might appear

On day two we were back in the forest before dawn and although the threatened snow hadn't appeared, the entire countryside was shrouded in freezing fog. Visibility was extremely poor, so much so that when the beaters and dogs marched noisily past it was virtually impossible to see any movement. The morning passed without sightings or any shots being fired and it was a



Eric Solano from France, Head Gamekeeper Jean wearing the St. Hubert Club cap, Frank and Arnout Vandevyvre, Belgium.

pleasant relief to return to the hunting lodge at lunchtime. The conversation was mainly about the dearth of animals and Head Gamekeeper Jean attributed this to both the freezing fog and a full moon. In the afternoon I had drawn a placement very close to a main road facing into the forest to await any boar that might appear from behind, as the drive was taking place in forestry on the other side. Interestingly, when standing with rifle in hand looking out at the road, the occupants of a Police car waved to me as it cruised by. I couldn't help but wonder how the occupants of a Garda car might have reacted in similar circumstances. The sole animal movement that afternoon comprised one female Roe deer that ran across the road and stood looking at me from about ten metres away. I had finally seen my first Roe deer but unfortunately an attempt to reach for the camera spooked it and off it went. At day's end when we returned to the lodge it transpired that of the twenty or so hunters involved, I was the only one to record seeing an animal that day. Before my final departure Jean appeared taken with my St. Hubert Club cap, so I gave it to him. That led to a slightly awkward situation (*pour moi*) as he insisted on expressing his thanks in the traditional continental way and having photographs taken to record the occasion. That evening we travelled back to Brussels - I had to catch an early morning flight to Dublin the following morning. Views from a number of high seats comprised the total amount of the country that I saw in daylight. All other movement took place in darkness. I'll have to go back sometime to see what Belgium looks like!

It would have been impossible for someone with my interest in WW2 not to be acutely aware of the events that had taken place throughout the Ardennes in December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge. Signposts pointing to place-names such as Bastogne, Namur, St.Vith, Malmedy etc are vivid reminders of those dark days. Babe Heffron, one of the original Band of Brothers as depicted in the Spielberg/Hanks TV series had soldiered here and in long conversations with him a few years ago one of the major discomforts that he described apart from cold and snow was the particularly horrible freezing fog that descended without warning on the Ardennes forest. These days, Heffron and Bill Guarnere who lost one of his legs in the Ardennes battle, meet every morning for coffee in their home town of Philadelphia. Guarnere's injury was depicted in the mini series. Both men are hale and hearty and well into their eighties.

The Irish Fly Fishing and Game Shooting Museum

The village of Attanagh is rather small. Situated just inside the Laois border with Co. Kilkenny and a few miles from the ancient monastic site of Durrow, it comprises just a few private homes, a school, a post office and a church. A village has stood here since the 10th century, its name being anglicised from the Irish 'Ath Tanaidhe' meaning a narrow ford, probably of the nearby River Owenbeg, a tributary, some fifteen miles in length, of the Nore which flows about a mile distant. The village itself is located on higher ground, no doubt to avoid flooding. An almanac entry for the 1850s states that it was a Post Town of the Queen's County with a church, vicarage and parish school. There was a railway station, a corn mill and constabulary barracks, three small businesses and a couple of tradesmen. Along with the corn mill, Attanagh also had a brick-works which in the early 1900s employed up to eighty people. The Attanagh Rectory was occupied by the rectors from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid 1930s. The magnificent stone church of St. Brigid now stands closed and abandoned. Time was when there were two pubs here, but not now. It appears that a man was killed in one of these hostelries during a dispute over a game of cards in the 1890s and the local magistrate of the time refused to renew the pub licenses of both as a consequence. The rural decline that has hit most communities did not skip Attanagh either and now the village could be more aptly described as a hamlet. In these modern times of Sat Navs and route planners, there is no need to describe how to get there



The sight that greets you at the entrance to the museum.

but, if you or those of you who have any even small interest in fishing, shooting or any outdoor pursuits, you will be pleasantly surprised. Right at the crossroads of the village is an unremarkable premises that is home to The Irish Fly Fishing and Game Shooting Museum which is the only museum of its kind in Ireland.

This museum has an extensive collection of artefacts on display which illustrate fishing, shooting and other countryside activities over the centuries. Walter has acquired some of his display pieces at auction, but many interesting items have proven unattainable due to the high prices fetched and, for the most part, he has gathered his collection through donations. This museum was founded in 1986 by Walter Phelan, in his own home, where he has restored and adapted a traditional



Curator and inspiration - Walter Phelan.

farmhouse to house a collection of vintage rods, reels, guns, tackle, tools and specimens of birds and fish.

Walter has fished and hunted all his life, trapping mink on the rivers and shooting over a wide area. He started off in a small way, collecting a few fishing reels, then a few rods, a few artefacts here and there and now the exhibition explores 300 years of hunting and fishing in Ireland. It is an absolute treat for anyone interested in country life. The premises was opened to the public in 1998 and all the material is available to anyone interested in doing any fishing or shooting research. The different sections hold the most amazing exhibits on shooting and fishing, but also on poaching and in hunting pursuits of all kinds.



An impressive taxidermy display.

While a mountain of print has been used to document the gun-makers of England, there has been little or no work done on their Irish counterparts. One must remember that Ireland was regarded world-wide as the second city of the Empire and there were gun-makers and gun repairers in many towns and cities, perhaps over 300 in all. While a whole article or series of articles could be dedicated to this subject, a few may be mentioned. The more famous were Rigby, (who was making guns 50 years before Purdy) Trulock and Harris, Thomas Fowler, both Braddocks and McCormacks and Calderwood of Belfast, most of these Irish made guns usually carried engravings of Irish setters on the actions. Walter maintains that shooting in Ireland was always different to England, in that most of the shooting here was walked up or over setting and pointing dogs rather than spaniels or retrievers. Walter works in the building trade and it is perhaps that being an artisan himself that he can readily appreciate the fine work and craftsmanship of others, but he readily admits that his favourite exhibits are the Rigby shotguns.

Most of the guns and fishing rods have been donated like the Mallow & Ettingsoll fly rod, made in Dublin, bought at the dispersal sale at Lissadell House in County Sligo and donated to the Museum by the Scottish purchaser who felt that it should remain in Ireland. The collection includes Enright rods, the longest measuring 26 feet, over 300 in all, but some are made of ash, even yew (a hazel rod features in a poem by Yeats). Many of the Irish manufactured fishing reels were actually made by jewellers in that they had the tools and machinery capable of producing the smallest of parts.

The exhibit has a Gamekeeper's Room, a Trapping Room, and even a Poacher's Room that displays purposely built man traps. These were outlawed here in 1829, but seemingly remained on active service until the 1880s. Their purpose was to maim rather than kill and all game preserves were advised to have three or four of these! As with all exhibitions, space is the problem. The museum houses some 2500 books, the oldest from the 1830s, 5000 magazines, 1500 catalogues. There are books on fishing, shooting, poaching and trapping and a large library of hunting dog prints

Walter is a Committee (and very much committed) Member of the Irish Red Grouse Association which is how I first got to know him and the Association holds some of its regular meetings on the premises. (An aside here: one of our detractors, and there are some, mostly those who did nothing to revive grouse numbers for decades, has scathingly alleged that we hold our meetings in a shed. Not true. This is a barn that has been converted to house many of the exhibits. Second aside: these same detractors think nothing of spending big money, money that could be better used in conservation,



The top harpoon was recovered from a dead whale, washed onto shore in Co. Galway and there are also flensing knives and other implements.

on hotel meeting rooms and travelling expenses.) He has collected most, if not all, of the reports produced on grouse research and his philosophy is simple: the research has already been done and is available, now it is time for action.

Perhaps Walter's latest project is his most exciting yet. He has been given a record of all the letters of one John Lee of Monasterevin, Co. Laois who emigrated to the Klondike, circa 1905 and wrote to his brother at home in the most graphic detail about his life there. It would seem that he never panned an ounce of gold, but worked as a full time supplier of fresh meat to the prospectors. While he may not have panned much gold, he did discover some in the crops of some of the wild duck he shot. Walter is about to publish these letters in book form in a limited edition, complete with photographs. Having seen the proof copy, I think this is an amazing work and a book well worth having. More at another time.

There are many readers who will have in their possession some old-time artefacts that are generally regarded as a nuisance and dust gatherers about the house and may be wondering how to dispose of them, knowing that they would be treasured. To anyone who may possess any shooting, fishing, books, game-books,



Fishing gaffs and eel gaffs.

hunting and fishing memorabilia, could I now appeal to their sporting nature to donate these to the museum where they will be treasured, but, what is more important, made available to all who appreciate such things? Space may be limited, but there is always room made for good exhibits.

Anyone wishing to visit the Museum should contact Walter Phelan at 086 3153088. There is no charge to visitors, but any donations towards upkeep of the premises (which is considerable) or to acquiring and thus preserving more relics from the past. This is an extraordinary exhibition and well worth a visit.



Some of the Rigby guns in the collection.



Traps of all descriptions showing man traps are at the rear of the display.



Waiting for the tide - a punt gun which has seen many a raft of duck.

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A Different Sort of Retriever - Hunting Poodles



Upland shooting - Angie and Rich Louter with two of their Louter Creek Hunting Poodles during a shooting trip - Showing just why they are excellent water dogs.

I remember discussing using poodles as gundogs, with the late Robert O'Farrell, a very accomplished retriever handler, who had trained poodles for TV work - including one which could play the piano. We came to the conclusion that because of the task for which they were originally bred i.e water dogs, and their natural ability and intelligence, properly trained, they could make excellent gundogs. I recently found out about a US couple who have taken up this challenge and have produced 'real' gundogs capable of not only performing a hunting and retrieving function but also capable of competing in hunting tests. I thought readers would be interested in hearing of the experiences of Angie and Rich Louter of the Louter Creek Hunting Poodles and I was delighted when they agreed to be interviewed.

Give us a little background about yourselves and your involvement with dogs and country sports.

As an avid waterfowl hunter and upland game bird hunter, I have always had dogs. Mainly Golden Retrievers for hunting not for retriever trials. When I met my wife, her daughter was allergic to dogs so we chose the Standard Poodle for both an inside pet and waterfowl retriever.

How long have you had poodles? Where did you get your first dogs - show stock? Are they now considered as primarily hunting dogs or dual purpose? How do they differ from show specimens?

We bought our first poodle 9 years ago and is our family pet. We were impressed with how smart she was and started reading all there was to read about poodles and were intrigued to find out that they were the original retrievers. I decided to buy another one and start training him as a puppy to retrieve. Our dogs are primarily hunting/working dogs but generally speaking



Hunters routinely use camouflage jackets for their dogs.

the breed is used as companion dogs but are also showed in conformation, agility, obedience, and other dog sports.

What made you decided to train poodles for gundog work? Please describe briefly the training that they undergo and the quarry that they are likely to encounter.

When training poodles for Hunting/Fieldwork the basics are the same as traditional breeds but corrections must be handled carefully as poodles will carry a grudge for a long time. Remember, they are a thinking breed. Poodles excel in Upland game hunting... (pheasant, quail, chucker, grouse etc.) and have a love for waterfowl hunting/retrieving as well. They are a flushing dog and if trained properly they are a close working dog.

What do you look for in a trained poodle?

- Things I look for in a trained poodle are:
- ~ Finding and retrieving downed game
 - ~ Steadiness to wing and shot
 - ~ Good manners in a duck blind

Have you any experience of training other retrievers, or other gundogs?

We have trained several Golden Retrievers, Chesapeake Bay retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, but prefer to train, own, and hunt over poodles.

Are there many other people training poodles for similar work? When you breed are the pups sold to working homes?

There are only a select few that are training poodles for upland, retriever trials as it requires a lot of hard work and dedication to the sport. Most of our pups are

sold to working homes such as hunting, agility and obedience.

How does the American Kennel Club view them in terms of their eligibility for taking part in tests and Field Trials?

The AKC allows all purebred AKC registered retrievers and spaniels to take part in hunt tests. Currently the AKC does not allow Standard Poodles to run Field Trials

Do you use the poodles for hunting or just gundog tests?

Some of our dogs are used in hunt tests and others excel in upland/waterfowl hunting.

What sort of hunting in what type of terrain and for what quarry species? Can you tell us briefly about a memorable day' hunting and what made that day special.

Waterfowl hunting is my favourite, it's a good day when your retriever is quite in the blind and the birds are coming in to land in your decoys. Providing my partners and I shoot well, watching dogs that we have trained make multiple retrieves is more rewarding than the actual hunt itself. I remember one particularly cold morning, "Reba" made several nice retrieves sliding on ice and jumping in to cold water after some crippled ducks. That is one of my most memorable hunts. My buddies are always telling that story about the poodle retriever!

How do you think they compare with other retrievers in terms of (a) water work (b) retrieving from and facing cover (c) trainability (d) speed (e) nose (f) overall agility?

Poodles are comparable to most other breeds, the key is proper training.



Fetch! This dog is a natural retriever in water and on land.

In general they have a more cautious water entry than labs.

b) Poodles will burst through cover... it is something we train for as small puppies to not avoid cover.

c) Poodles are a soft breed, once taught they are willing to please and take correction well.

d) Poodles speed are up there with the labs, they will take off with lots of enthusiasm.

e) They have a good nose and they are intelligent enough to use it.

f) They are very agile. We often set up jumps such as logs and brush inline to their marks to teach them to jump and not to go around.

Any other advantages and disadvantages?

The biggest advantage in owning a poodle is they do not shed or stink and are hypoallergenic. They have a great disposition and are very good family dogs and love children

Tell us a little bit about the tests you do with the dogs and describe how able they are to compete with the other breeds.

The tests we run consist of multiple marked retrieves on land and water. Blind retrieves on land and water. Upland portion of the tests consist of quartering and sit to flush, and trailing.

Can they run in Field Trials and gain Field Trial Titles?

Poodles are eligible to run hunt tests and earn titles in (AKC), (UKC), (NAHRA), and our breed clubs WC/WCX events.

What dog is your most successful dog and what awards does he/she have?

Our most successful dog is UH HRCH MHR Southern Standards Red Creole MH WCX "Cooper." He holds the top titles in all 3 venues including the Working Certificate Excellence with the Poodle Club Of America's test. We also have other dogs with similar titles and we have put more hunt test titles on Poodles than any trainer in the USA.

UH HRCH Websters Red High Heels SH WCX "Layla"

HR Louter Creek's Red Derringer JH WC "Bremer"

HR Redlines Radiant Red Reba JH WC "Reba"

UH which stands for Upland Hunter with the (UKC)

HRCH which stands for Hunting Retriever Champion with the (UKC)

MHR which stands for Master Hunter Retriever with the (NAHRA)

MH which stands for Master Hunter with the (AKC) Fifth one is the WCX which stands for Working Certificate Excellent with the (PCA)

"A Breed Title" for the (Poodle Club Of America)

If someone from the UK or Ireland wants to train their poodle what advice would you give? Do you think the show bred dogs still retain some inherent inherited ability/instinct?

A lot of poodles may have the retrieving instinct and prey drive required of a hunting dog but it needs to be awakened at a very early age. (8-9 weeks) We start with clipped wing quail and pigeons at 7-8 weeks.

If someone from the UK or Ireland wants to purchase a hunting poodle where and how can they get one?

Look for a reputable breeder of good sound pups first and foremost with the appropriate health testings and follow a good retriever training program.

What are your plans for the future and would you like to add anything else.

Our long term goal is to continue to produce a line of working poodles and to erase the stigma of poodles being called the Foo-Foo dogs that they see at dog shows and on T.V.

And you can see one of the poodles in action on www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxMWYz5iL7c and www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxMWYz5iL7c

A duck is quickly brought to hand.





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A Wild Goose Chase

A bad experience 'first time out' doesn't put Liz off as she braves freezing Scotland again for a 'Pink' or two



After the flight - The author reflects on a successful flight.

Having heard so many of my friends' recollections of goose shooting, I decided last year to book my first trip to Montrose in Scotland, to try to find out if I would catch what everyone had referred to as 'Goose Fever.' Unfortunately on that occasion things didn't go to plan. Like most holidays I'm up at the crack of dawn getting all my gear together to get started on the road to catch the earliest sailing. I was excited and hoping I hadn't forgotten anything, especially not my make-up bag, something the guys I shoot with love to tease me about as I wear a balaclava anyway. En route we stopped in Gleneagles for a shot at their clay shooting range which was somewhere I had always wanted to shoot, my excuse was that it would help prepare for the real thing. There they have their own shooting school where an instructor guides you on how to shoot all the different types of sporting birds. They range from ptarmigan to teal but my favourite had to be the King Pheasant, which is driven from

a high tower at high speed. At the school you are able to borrow a gun or you can use your own and they provide you with their own personalised cartridges. We were able to have a mini competition between my brother and I, before we headed back to the clubhouse for a coffee and then back on the road.

After a few hours, we arrived in Montrose where we met our guide who brought us round to our B&B. We hastily unpacked, as that evening we were off to shoot ducks at a shore pond, before the goose shooting in the morning. We had quite a good evening, shooting 10 mallard and it seemed as if things were looking good for the rest of the trip. The next morning we were up at 5am to get ready for our first goose flight. I was pretty excited as the flight was a first for me. When we arrived at the stubble field, we quickly got to work at building our two goose hides, while our guide hastily got all the decoys laid out in the field. Once everything was set up, all the gear packed away and everyone was in their hides, it was then just a waiting game. The first birds didn't arrive until around 8am but skein after skein seemed to be spooked by something and were not

attracted much to our field. Overall we managed to shoot 11 geese amongst five of us and I was pleased to have shot my first goose.

The second day we moved into another field close to where all the geese had been the day before and we were happy seeing traces that the geese had actually been there. Again something kept spooking the birds and they wouldn't come near us making shooting very difficult, so we had to take any opportunity we got. In the end we shot 14 geese.

Speaking to the local gundealer he said that it was likely to have been a problem with the decoys, as they were new and shiny but also there could have been an issue with how the decoys were laid out because if they were quite close together, the birds would not have enough space to land. That evening our guide was going to take us back out to the same pond we shot two nights previously, but we declined as we didn't believe that the ducks would be back so soon. By that stage last year we were fed up with the whole holiday as both our goose flights didn't work well and we weren't able to go rough shooting in the afternoon as October was too early in the season. The lesson I learnt from that trip was to make sure you had everything planned in writing, so you knew what you were doing each day. I didn't let that trip dishearten me. Before I had even left Scotland I had next season's trip planned. We got speaking to an old friend of ours by coincidence in the gun shop, a guy my father had stalked with for years. He put us in contact with another guide and assured us that we would be well looked after.

This season I couldn't wait, and we went in November because it meant that we could do more rough shooting in the afternoons. The only thing that I was worrying about was the cold at that time of year, so I made sure I packed lots of extra thermals and all my hand warmers! At the boat all we had to do was declare that we had guns with us, show our licences and they then let us through without any issue. This time we stayed quite close to Montrose in a place called St Cyrus. We booked into the St Cyrus Hotel which was really nice, it had clean comfortable rooms, a restaurant, bar,



Paying proper attention to the decoys was effective.

pool table and they even had entertainment some evenings. This meant we didn't have far to travel for evening meals and there was plenty to do there at night.

Thirteen pinks accounted for but we had seen thousands!

Our guide, John Bailie and his team, operated from the hotel, so we got to meet them that evening and confirm everything we had planned for the holiday. I don't think that John was quite expecting me, as he said I was the first woman he had taken goose shooting. That night we had plenty of time to get unpacked, get something to eat and catch an early night for our 5am start in the morning. When we got up, John was already waiting for us and we quickly travelled over to our field to set up our hides in a ditch drain. They were very well concealed and hard to spot walking into the field because very little was showing of them. They even had all the comforts inside as John had brought crates for everyone to sit on and, because you were down low, they were quite warm being out of the stormy weather. John also put foam decoys over the plastic ones and when we asked him why he said it was to prevent them from being shiny - the problem we had the previous year. The first geese arrived about 8am once the fog started to lift off the Montrose basin. John was able to distinguish all the different types of goose calls, so he could tell when the geese were wary. They were cautious coming in at the start, so he got up to alter the decoys and after that the geese decoyed well. We shot 13 pink foot geese that morning but had seen thousands!

In the afternoon, we divided up as some of us had planned to go duck shooting while Philip and I went out deer stalking. Neither Philip or I had ever shot any roe deer before so we were excited and couldn't wait. As it was November, only the does were in season, so we couldn't go after any trophy heads. First, we checked the zeroing on our rifles and once we proved that they were reliable we were placed in high seats in the Brotherstone Estate. John's son Rob took us out, as he had quite a bit of experience stalking; I had never shot from a high seat before so he stayed with me for a while. It was very encouraging to hear the sounds of the roe calling from all around me, although none appeared. Just before dark we



The team relax in the cold light of a misty dawn.

decide to take a walk and spotted quite a few roe deer in a field. You could see the bucks chasing the does and the fawns sticking close with their mums, which was great to see. Unfortunately we both were unable to claim our first that evening.

Skein after skein

The next morning my brother Mark, Philip and I went stalking again, so we had another very early start, while the rest got a lie in bed. Mark and Philip were taken for a walk with the guides, while I was sent on a stalk up to another high seat. Along the way I could hear the sound of something in the forest but nothing appeared. When I made it to my high seat I sat for about an hour watching and listening to all the pheasants fighting and crowing around me, and I could see skein after skein of geese flying overhead. All of a sudden a young buck wandered out of the forest and was no more than 20 yards away from me. Cheekily he lifted the lid of one of the pheasant feeders and ate till he had his fill. I couldn't believe it, if only it had have been a doe. Mark and Philip where both unsuccessful too, while they did manage to see roe they were only mere glimpses as they bolted across forest rides.

After breakfast, we went out for some rough shooting with John's team. While we shot around 30 pheasants and Mark shot a woodcock, we spent most of the afternoon chasing partridge to no avail. The pheasants flew very well with the strong gusts, making them very challenging. The one exasperating thing was the number of roe deer we saw out walking; I couldn't get over how close they where, if only we had the rifle instead!

When we arrived back at the cars, John and Rob were ready, waiting to take us on to our next goose flight, something he called a goose roost. We had no time to go back to the hotel to get changed, but we quickly changed our chokes to full and set off. The pond we were heading to was one John only shoots three or four times a season. The pond was a splash on the top of a hill with larges masts beside it and when we drove up, there were hundreds of ducks and geese already there. He introduced it as Scotland's 'Scarborough Beach' because you shoot from deck chairs beside the water, with camouflage nets to cover you and, just like Scotland, it was absolutely freezing.

The shooting was brilliant and something we had never done before; I couldn't believe how well it worked. Skeins of 1000 plus came in at any one time; the noise was most notable, like a jet plane taking off. I found it really strange to shoot from lying down but it was so effective and odd to think that the birds couldn't see us. The teal amongst the geese had to be the added bonus but they flew so excellently we couldn't even hit any.

On our final morning, we had great weather with prefect conditions for stalking, so I went with Rob, determined to get my first roe, while everyone else went out for the final goose flight. We managed to spot around four roe at first light at the edge of a wood, alongside a stubble field. We had to stalk all the way down to the forest then commando crawl out into the field. And slowly, very slowly, when I had a safe shot, I managed to shoot my first roe doe in the neck with a Sauer .243, felling it on the spot. We waited a moment, then went and carried out the necessary preparations on the beast.

As the deer was shot, bled and gralloched by 7.30am I was able to go and join the rest for the final goose flight of the trip. The only thing was that, because I was soaked through from crawling on the wet ground, I froze and it made that flight harder to bear so I had to leave half an hour earlier than I would have liked.

Being a Saturday John wasn't able to accompany us for our final flight because they were having a shoot on the estate but, nonetheless we had a brilliant morning and will be back again next year. So yes, I guess that you could say that I had caught goose fever!

If you wish find out more about planning a trip of your own to shoot geese, you can contact John Bailie on 07540648887.

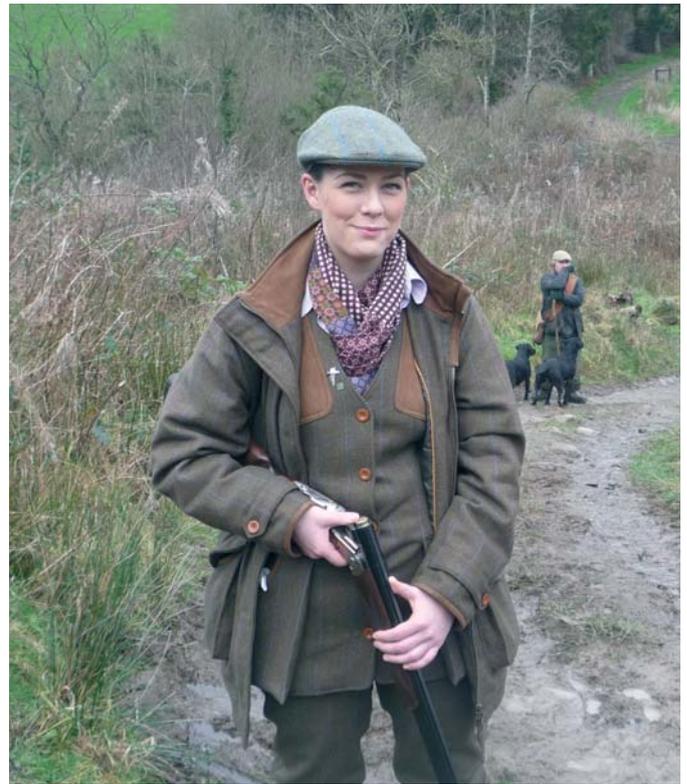


A fitting reward for all the waiting and watching in freezing conditions.

By Liz Edgar

A female view of shooting at Drumbanagher Estate

Set in the lush rolling Armagh countryside lie the hidden gems of Drumbanagher Estate. Only five minutes away from Newry, it's situated close to the small town of Poyntzpass. Once home to the Close family, the 650 acre walled estate is now managed as a commercially run shooting estate, where parties of all sizes can come to shoot early season ducks, driven game and semi walked-up days near the end of the season. The estate is now managed by the keeper, Brian Byrne, backed by his team of dedicated beaters and pickers-up, along with Raymond Rocks who accompanied me for the day.



The author waiting for the first drive of the day to begin at Drumbanagher.

Very close to the end of the season, I went to shoot in the estate for the first time, along with my Dad, and friends Albert, Neil, Thomas and Bradley. Dad and I travelled down to the estate with Albert in his Jeep but thankfully I had been warned to dress warmly before getting into his vehicle as he is really fond of the cold air ventilation!

Arriving in the estate, already fully acclimatised for the outside conditions, we met the keeper preparing his dogs for the day, before he showed us to the gun room where we got warmed by the toasty wood stove.

Once we were ready, had our boots on and all our gear together, we set off. I was the youngest so, accompanied by Raymond Rocks, was chosen to do most of the walking, something I didn't mind because, being a female I think we feel the cold more, so walking helps to keep warm, especially with the weather that was predicted to be cold and wet.

On our first drive we were placed up a large hill by a forest and, once all the guns were in position, one of the beaters radioed through to the keeper and then the horn was sounded to let us know we could begin. It was a few minutes before the first birds appeared, somehow the ducks managed to evade me, but the



In good company with keen shot and stalker Raymond Rocks.

following pheasants, breaking over the wood, were not so lucky and got me off to a start.

Rocketing birds

For the next few drives we were placed along a long wooded path where we had the opportunity of some fast and furious snap shooting. Here, I caught my first glimpse of a woodcock diving from cover and I also remember rocketing birds speeding away from me while standing under a giant sequoia. It would definitely be a great drive for an experienced shot.

After being led down the wrong path by fellow guns, we somehow managed to make it to the next drive, with my leather boots slightly worse for wear. In this drive we stood in a sloping field next to another wood. I remember in this drive being surprised to have shot a pheasant through the trees, as it's not a shot I would often take. Albert was lucky to shoot the first woodcock of the day here.

To get to the next drive I had quite a bit of walking to do, because I had to get from the very top of the hill I was on over to the top of the next, in order to stop any birds breaking back, while the other guns waited at the bottom for the birds to be pushed forward. Raymond was brilliant as he offered to carry my gun and bag. My Dad, overhearing this, decided to chance his arm and see if he was willing to take his as well. I was surprised to hear him say he would, although he was only joking. I had to agree that it was better exercise than going to the gym but also thought it was funny that Rodney Watson said

he wouldn't mind doing it all day long, never mind the fact he was on the quad.

We then moved onto another drive where we surrounded a patch of game crop. The beaters pushed the wood forward and then the dogs flushed the birds over. Below us I could see the estate's rifle range where it would be possible to shoot back to 200m. (I had heard that the estate would sometimes have a few red deer lurking in their woods.)

'Speed loading'

The next drive was my favourite: the beaters pushed a wood forward towards a wall. Here the birds either flew over the wall or turned back and sometimes they flew high above the wall to where I was standing. At this drive, Rodney had to stand with me to help me get my gun loaded fast enough. By this stage the rain had just started, so we walked quickly down to the final drive. I think Neil and Albert were the luckiest on this drive, as most of the birds flew their way, but the previous week those pegs had seen hardly any. After having just mentioned that I hadn't yet shot a duck, the next shot I fired got me my first duck. I was happy to end on a high note, before heading back for warm soup and plenty of chocolate cake.

All in all we had a great day with good shooting, a well managed shooting team and good craic. I especially liked the idea put forward over lunch of getting more women into shooting by Drumbanagher offering a 60% discount, although I'm not too sure about the idea of one

of the other guns saying he might don a tweed skirt to take advantage of it. His big hairy legs hanging out below it might give him away.

To see Drumbanagher for yourself check out www.lonehunter.eu or for more information visit www.drumbanaghershoot.co.uk



Liz and her father Richard enjoyed some excellent shooting.

Drumbanagher Estate Shoot

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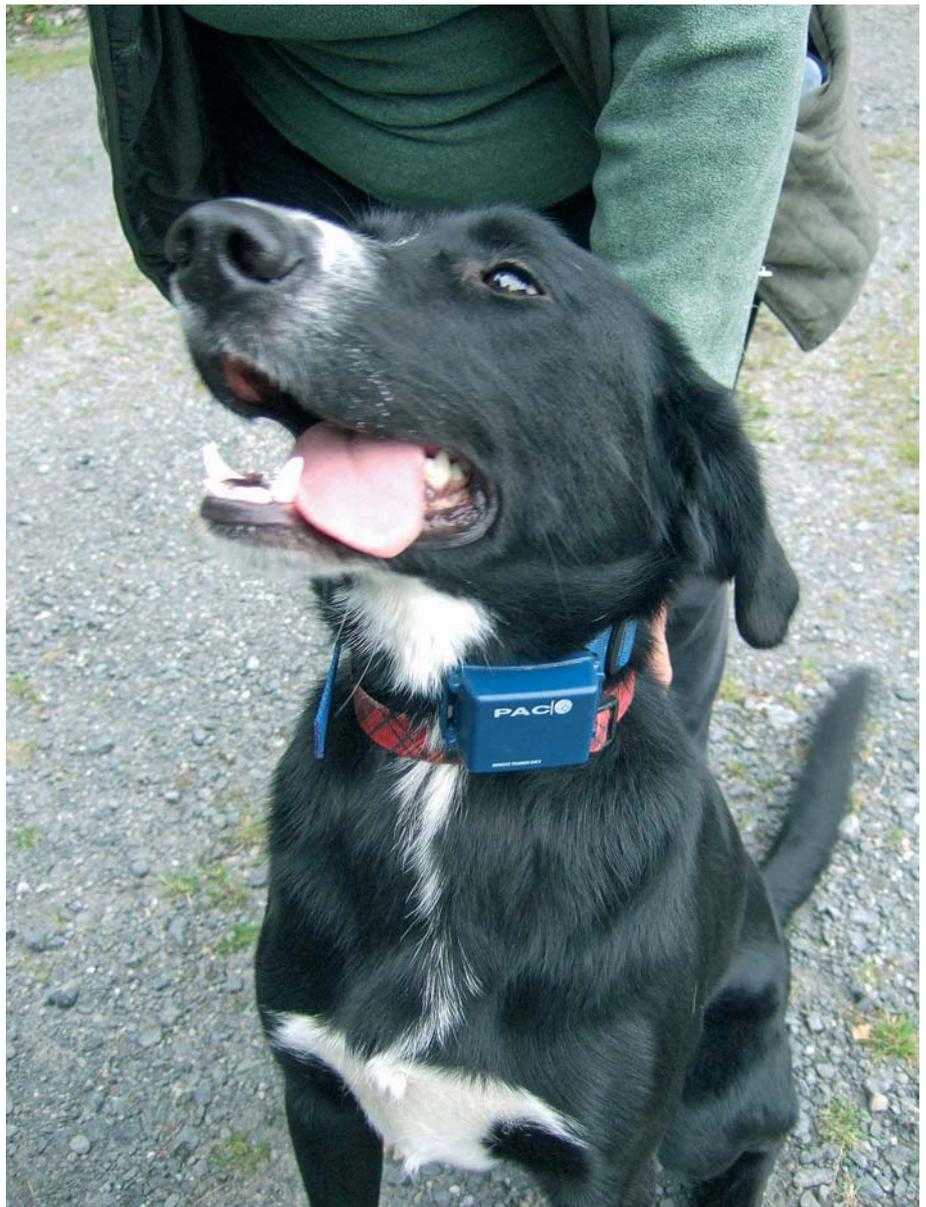
A Dog Trainer Which Will Save Dog's Lives And Get Rid Of Stress

Dogs have been a part of my life for many years and their companionship and friendship is a wonderful thing. When humans are being unpleasant to you dogs never are. Sometimes, when feeling tired, I've stretched myself out on the dining room floor and put my woollen coat over me. Soon the dogs are around me, lick my hands a few times, do a few circles and settle down against me. Shortly afterwards we are all asleep. They say he who lies down with dogs will rise up with fleas but this has only happened to me once. Many years ago I woke up with my Labrador/sheepdog cross lying in my arms and saw a flea bounce incredibly high. I noticed there was a flea in my ear; the insect had gone deep into my ear and its buzzing was very irritating. I was reminded of the famous Victorian explorer Speke who poured hot oil down his ear because an insect had burrowed into his brain. Horrible thought! I clasped my nose and blew air through my ears as forcefully as I could. Nothing. I blew several more times. Nothing. One great almighty blow. The flea flew out and hit the wall. So, the dogs in my life have been indelibly associated with open fires, long winter evenings and a sense of cosiness. But they have also accompanied me on many a hill-walk throughout the mountain regions of Ireland. I've brought them up to the rocky heights of the highest peaks in the country and often walked for periods of ten or more hours with them in montane country. This article is about a great dog training tool called Pac Remote Trainers and I have

found this tool to be invaluable for my outdoor experience with my dogs.

I love horses as well and I often go fox hunting but I have never owned a gundog. However the Pac Remote Trainers would be ideal for training gun dogs as well, I'm sure.

The reason I am writing this article is that many people don't know about this great training tool and knowledge of it could save many dogs' lives. It will also get rid of a lot of stress from your outdoor experiences. I wish I had found it sooner because then the couple of terriers that I brought out hillwalking wouldn't have caused me the stress they did. Many years ago, for example, when walking in the Slieve Blooms we were nearing the end of a nine hour walk. We had entered



sheep country and our terrier disappeared. Five minutes later we came around the bend of a river and saw our terrier hanging out of the neck of a sheep. There was blood on the sheep's neck and the terrier's feet were dangling above the ground. At that moment the farmer turned up. I apologised and gave him my name and address, telling him I would pay whatever compensation was necessary. The sheep was still alive and still walking around. I never heard from the farmer again.

On another occasion we were walking in the Galty Mountains when my terrier disappeared. We were at 3,000 feet, the hilltop was covered in cloud, so visibility was no more than 50 feet and a very strong wind was blowing. I walked around that hilltop for an hour calling for the terrier. Nothing happened. I gave up trying and headed back to the car which was an eight mile walk down very rough country. I left my name and phone number with a woman in a bungalow at the bottom of the hills and never expected to see the dog again. The next day she rang me to say the dog had turned up at the bungalow! I don't know how it found its way down from that height, for such a long distance, back to where my car had been parked. These are just two of my examples. I'm sure there are countless shooters and hillwalkers who have similar stories to mine.

A couple of years ago we acquired a lurcher and another dog, called Cullen, which is perhaps a mix of a Labrador and something else. They are both handsome looking dogs and wonderful companions. However Cullen had a terrible chasing problem, who wanted to chase anything on four legs. He never killed anything but chased them for a few minutes before finally responding to my shouts and coming back to me.

I bought a book on dog training and read it carefully. Some of the techniques in it worked with the dogs but nothing worked when it came to sheep-chasing. I watched the Dog Whisperer and admired his ability to change dog's behaviour. I was never going to become a dog whisperer so I surfed the net looking for a solution. Eventually I came across Pac Remote Trainers and ordered them.

A positive transformation

Pac Trainers are electronic collars and a handset which administer an electric shock to the dog, up to several hundred yards distance. I put the electronic collar on Cullen and brought him into a large field filled with a herd of 50 sheep. I let him off the lead and he immediately set off in the flock's direction. When he was no more than a couple of yards from one of the sheep I pressed my handset's button. Cullen recovered and began to pursue the flock again. I pressed the button again. Cullen stopped chasing and returned to me.

Now whenever I go into a field of sheep Cullen takes on an air of anxiety and comes over to me. He remained beside me until we left the field of sheep. The Pac Trainer produced a very positive transformation in my dog and now he never chases sheep. It's been several months since I used the Trainer and there hasn't been any recidivist behaviour.

The Pac Trainer therefore has been invaluable to me and has removed this tension from my walks. I can't recommend it highly enough.

Publishers Note:

I have always been ambivalent about electric collars and their use in training dogs. I have always believed I could and have trained GSDs, retrievers and setters to respond to a stop whistle without their use. I have seen dogs brutalised by their misuse but then the same trainers who have misused them would without them, have probably resorted to other questionable means.

Certainly the theory of using a 'short sharp shock' to change behaviour is rational and in circumstances such as the circumstances described by Derek, I can see that there may be little alternative. We would like to hear views for and against the use of the electric collar.



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Country Chat

This time a young lad's first stag, hits and misses at rocketing grouse and a friend 'on the fiddle' serve up Scottish memories for Billy

For an 'auld gouser' like myself who shoots quite a bit on his own, it makes a pleasant change to get the opportunity to join up with friends every now and then, especially when as such it's an invitation to a shooting holiday. One Tuesday morning back in October, I called at my friend's house to drive him to Larne for the 10.30am ferry to Cairnryan. Booked on the same ferry and there already was John, Peter and Andy. The five of us travelling in a two jeep convoy to the Spittle of Glenshee Lodge, 23 miles or so from Blairgowrie, which is roughly about a five hour drive from Cairnryan. We were looking forward to this trip, for we were shooting on two different estates at walked-up grouse over pointers, setters and spaniels, which some would say is a more challenging bird in October than it would be in August. And if any of us were lucky enough to bag a brace of these 'heather-rockets' then we would be very lucky indeed.

As the five of us sat chatting and drinking coffee on the ferry, already out on the moor was a father and son from Armagh. They had gone over two days previously to enjoy a birthday treat of two days stalking stags on the Invercauld estate. Young Cormac McSherry stalked and shot his stag on the Monday morning, leaving them ample time not only to gralloch and get the beast off the hill - not forgetting the 'bloodying' ceremony of course, for it was his first ever stag - but also to visit the House of Bruar later in the afternoon. His father Chris successfully stalked and shot his stag the next morning, again leaving them plenty of time in the afternoon to visit the nearby town of Braemar. Chris had recorded the two day's stalking, which we were privileged to view when we all met up on the Tuesday evening.

Right beside him, awaiting instructions, was the young lad

Out on the hill, the young lad was accompanied by two very experienced people in their field and did everything that his guide Liam Donald had advised him, and I can think of none more experienced than Liam from the Invercauld estate. When Liam stooped in the early stages of the stalk, so too did young Cormac. When Liam crawled on hands and knees, ditto young McSherry and when Liam belly crawled into position, there



Billy and the rest of the 'Magnificent Seven.'

right beside him awaiting instructions was the young lad. Even at this stage, his father could be forgiven for feeling immense pride for his son.

In contrast, I was talking to a hill keeper who had out on the hill, an 'experienced' party of guns which had requested and booked as part of their week's package, three days stalking stags. At times some of them were standing when they should have been down, coughing or talking when they should have been quiet and, on two different occasions, after having tramped a considerable distance over rough terrain which predictably was more up than down, actually missed the selected beast. On another day the Shot picked a different stag to the one he was instructed to cull because, 'it had a better head!' A keeper friend once told me that when booking stags some clients tell him on the phone that they are reasonably fit yet, when they get there, they walk a short distance from their vehicles and then plead to turn back.

The two McSherrys on the other hand must have been like a breath of fresh air to Liam, for not only are they fit as the proverbial fiddle, but also by all accounts, they both successfully stalked and shot their selected stags with comparative ease on each of the consecutive mornings. Both of them starting their day by zeroing in the rifle's telescopic sights at the deer target situated at the back of Liam's house. The same target incidentally which I stopped to admire when I was pair counting grouse back in March 2011.

On the Monday morning out on the hill, having got into position, Liam pointed out the stag he wanted culled. He then handed young Cormac the heavy Tikka .308 calibre rifle with instructions to shoot when ready. The stag was standing with a herd of hinds about 120 yards away. Calmly the young lad took aim, looking through the powerful Swarovski sights he placed

the cross on the chest region, just an inch or so behind the upper part of the stag's front leg, choosing to take it humanely with a heart shot. Holding his breath and locking the rifle into his shoulder he slowly squeezed the trigger, concentrating on his target and not the trigger bite, he dropped the stag where it stood. The stag was a six pointer and was about thirteen years old while the young lad who ended the stag's reign on the hill, was enjoying his eighteenth birthday treat. On the Wednesday morning we left the hotel around nine in a three Jeep convoy with Chris and Cormac leading the way. Half an hour later and with introductions over, we were lined out on the hill ready for the off. John was at the top of the hill with one of his German Pointers, having left the younger of the two in the Jeep until after lunch. Next was Andy, who had never shot a grouse before so all this was new to him. On Andy's right was Chris, who had his two English Setters with him and, as well as shooting, would be working them over the two days for Andy and Cormac. Cormac and the keeper, also called Andy, were in the middle of the line, while next to them was Peter who had his springer with him. Larry and I were on the extreme right of the line. I had Ceara the German Pointer and Tia the Vizsla with me, and we were looking after my friend Larry as four years had passed since he last shot a grouse. John on the top left was the first to bag a bird, with Peter next to connect shooting one of a pair, its mate passing across the front of us on a left to right flight which Larry missed. A short while later my two had a good find on a covey of four. I selected one flying off at an arc to my right, dropping it with a single shot, swinging on to another I missed it cleanly.

Cautiously, the HPRs approached a patch of heather on a small hillock

We regrouped shortly after and, with a new directive, Larry and I were banished to the extreme left of the line, with instructions to walk towards a distant hill, marking it as our point of aim. To be fair to Chris our team captain and to Andy the keeper, most of the shooting was top and centre of the line, so it was suggested that we may get more shooting out on our own. When we got to the bottom of the hill the two HPRs cautiously approached a patch of heather on a small hillock, but before we could get any closer, a pair flushed and although rangy, I managed to bag the cock bird from the duo. At the top of the hill we stopped to take in the view and looking back for the two dogs I could see that Tia the Vizsla was on point. I told Larry to walk towards her while I stood back and as he got closer to Tia, a single hen shot up out of the heather taking the two of us by surprise. Larry tipped it with his first shot and dropped it with his second. "Thank goodness for that," I said, I didn't want him going back for lunch with an empty game bag.

After lunch, John, with his young German pointer, Larry



Young Cormac McSherry stalked and shot his stag.

and I, found ourselves walking along the side of a mountain, isolated from the rest of the team. Halfway along the mountain, five grouse suddenly appeared from nowhere, rocketing towards us about two telegraph poles high, passing right over the top of us and, such was their speed, each of us managed a single shot only. All five birds disappeared as quickly as they appeared. When on my own later, Ceara started to feather on a patch of burnt heather, with me in tow, she left the burnt patch at quite a pace. Her nose to the ground, she tracked along for what seemed like ages, until eventually she got to the side of a huge boulder, when a cock bird took to the air. I missed it with both barrels! I was very annoyed with myself and I felt sorry for the old lady who had done so well to find and produce the bird - all I had to do was block it out for one shot. But then again, that's grouse for you. We ended the day with seven and a half brace among the seven of us.

The next day, on a different estate, it was a case of good shots, bad shots and missed shots, no individual claiming the distinction of being a hot shot. That's why I admire these little game birds so much. Chris, John and I are very privileged to walk-up and shoot grouse, year after year, shooting over very seasoned pointers and setters, yet these plucky little game birds constantly make fools of us and our dogs. We ended the second day with eight brace. I had taken two boxes of twenty-bore sixes over with me and I came back with fifteen shells. Thirty-five shots fired only at grouse over the two days and I accounted for four brace. As I said before - that's grouse for you.

Now then, I have deliberately cut short my writing this time to pay tribute to Andy McCormick the new lad on the team. When we all met up on the Tuesday evening, Andy entertained us into the wee small hours with a button-keyed accordion and Irish folk music and my goodness it certainly was the best of entertainment. Long after we leave the grouse and the moors and Scotland behind, no one present will ever forget the getting together of seven friends, as like-minded in sport as they are in friendship. I make no apologies for thanking Andy again, for the fantastic entertainment he put on for all of those present in the lodge that evening, to Chris for organising and setting it all up and, of course to the friends who made it all happen. It's not what you shoot, it's not where you shoot, it's who you share your sport with, that makes your days so special.



Andy's button-keyed accordion and Irish folk music entertained into the small hours.



The Glennoo Phoenix

Glennoo offers shooting in one of the most beautiful settings in the country.

Nowadays, the 'Glennoo' brand incorporates game shooting, trout and salmon angling and various training programmes, ranging from game guiding to all forms of shooting and fishing skills. We began life in 2009 as Glennoo Shoot, offering small game bird days to groups of 3-6 shooters on the bog and forest slopes of Glennoo and Mullaghfad Mountains. Since then, we have expanded our game shoot and introduced exciting new offers in angling and training. Our shooting business was based on red partridge on the heather moors south of Fivemiletown in the Sliabh Beagh range of mountains that straddle the border between Tyrone and Monaghan, with a wee bit of Fermanagh thrown in.

Following a successful full trial of our shoot in 2010, we expanded our pen base to cater for 3000 birds for the 2011/12 season. This work was literally just finished as we headed for the Ballywalter Fair on the last day of April 2011 and we were looking forward to a good season with plenty of bookings already 'in the bag' particularly from our regulars, syndicates and a growing interest from the field trial clubs. We won't forget that day in a hurry for a mobile phone call at around 8.30am, just as we pulled up at the exhibitors car park, informed us the mountain was on fire. To the question 'which part?' came back the answer we didn't want to hear... 'all of it!' And so began four days of destruction. Along with the fire service, we battled gorse and moor fires which raged through the tinder dry grasses and heather destroying grouse, pipit and hen harrier nests, plus anything and everything else in its way. Eventually, driven by high winds, the fire took to the woods to begin a cat and mouse game with the firefighters. We were left on the Tuesday with one 30 acre strip not burnt, but

airborne sparks set that off around midday eventually burning out in a forest block the following day just before the rains started.

When the smoke had cleared, we were left with no heather, no grasses and no rushes plus 12 of our pens reduced to cinders and twisted wire. Worse still were the little bundles of eggs that stood out against the black ground scattered over the mountain. Our grouse, which we had protected from shooting and predators for three years, had suffered terribly, but we will not know the real extent of this until the spring and summer counts of 2012.

To be honest we gave serious thought to quitting at this stage and indeed, apart from gathering up the debris of the pens, we stayed away from the mountain for a few weeks. Thankfully the heavy rain, mild weather and Mother Nature began to do their bit and the mountain grasses, which provide cover for our birds, began to grow again. It was indeed like seeing the Phoenix rise from the ashes and I think more than anything the sight of Glennoo Mountain turning green again from these black ashes encouraged us to get stuck in and, by June, we had rebuilt the pens and, within no time, our first birds began arriving. Given the extra workload and cost, we focussed on our upland red partridge shoot in 2011 and we had a successful season despite the incessant rains in September and October taking a toll on the partridge.

Moving forward with more to offer

Our beating team of Joe, Paul, Pat, Lance and Colin performed heroics and we managed to fulfil all our bookings. We also managed to run quite a few dog trials in 2011 and these were very successful, with some great battles over the Cleen River. For the honest feedback we got from some of Ireland's top handlers we are grateful and even implemented a fair bit of it! Our shooting dates



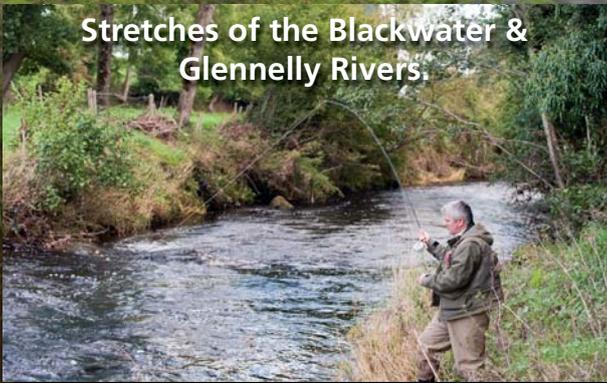
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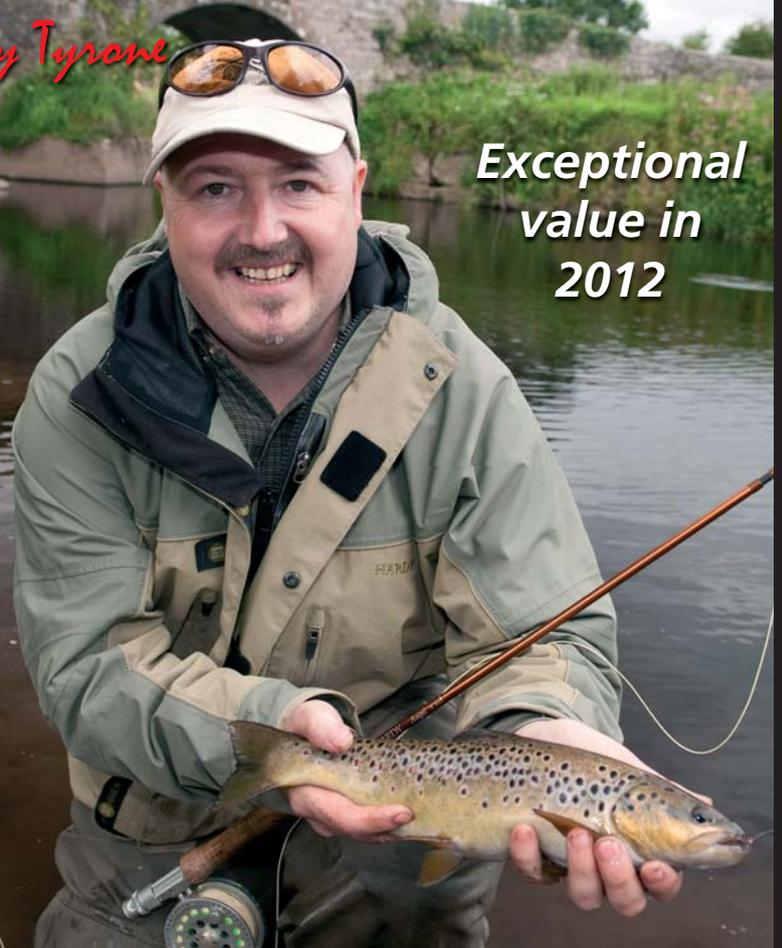
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Glennoo fishing is proud to offer a wide range of angling opportunities mainly in the Tyrone area. We have two beautiful mountain loughs – Crockacleaven stocked with quality rainbow trout and Natroeys with browns. These spacious venues near Clogher are set in tranquil surroundings, yet are readily accessible by car. They provide excellent boat fishing from the good quality traditional Irish boats provided. The number of season tickets are limited to 25 and a few are available at the incredible price of

£150 for both loughs with boat provided.

Day tickets are also available for two anglers plus an angling guide for £150. We also can offer day tickets for stretches of the River Blackwater near Clogher and the Glennelly above Plumbridge providing salmon and wild trout fishing at very affordable prices.

*For Further details visit **www.glennoo.com** or contact **Tom Woods +44(0)7743550804 or tom@glennoo.com***



Sporting birds for the discerning Shot.

were fully booked and indeed we quickly found demand outstripping supply. During the winter, at the suggestion of Albert Titterington, we experimented with grey partridge on our lowland coverts and bogs with outstanding results. Likewise, our driven duck proved immensely popular as part of the day's proceedings, particularly on the very wet mornings. It also became apparent that the addition of pheasants, which we have up to now only dabbled in, would both extend our season and offer a truly mixed bag to our guns. So that has really set the agenda for the future. In 2012/13 season we can offer our clients a mix of grey partridge, red partridge, duck, pheasant, woodcock and snipe. Our bag sizes will range from 40-80 birds on average and we can offer a mix of semi driven and pure walked up days, extending now into December and January.

We are introducing a new concept called 'Walked up Wednesdays' which will offer individuals the chance to join up as a team for a full shooting day without having to organise it or chase up a team of guns themselves. Our packages remain very competitive and we can cater for up to eight guns on the mountain and five or six guns on the pheasant and grey partridge coverts. Our shoot cabin is available for tea and coffee and the post match analysis, when Wayne can tell you where you went wrong!

Glennoo of course is about more than shooting and this year we are launching fully our fishing packages, which sort of got pushed to one side last season as we tried to get our 'Phoenix' to fly again. We have some superb trout fishing from boats on two beautiful, 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. We can also offer day tickets on the Blackwater at Clogher which is a prolific wild trout river, as well as tickets on a private salmon beat on the Glenelly River above Plumbridge.

Training courses on offer

Glennoo also offers a range of training courses in field sports related skills, from basic technique courses through to accredited instructor and guide courses. Regrettably, the modern world is somewhat fixated with 'competency qualifications' and equally regrettable is the number of non accredited courses that seem to cost a lot, yet are not worth the paper the certificate is printed on. We offer accredited courses with a recognised vocational provider. Please check the website for current courses, or if you want something we do not offer please get in contact and we can either direct you to an accredited provider or perhaps tailor something for you.

Finally back to the grouse. We have seen a few adult birds, mainly female, this winter and one covey of five birds and there are still birds further out on the mountain so hope, like the Phoenix, is rising again. Glennoo has just joined the Red Grouse Species Action Plan delivery group and we hope to begin a restoration programme in the years ahead. We intend to do a count of the entire mountain this coming spring and summer with the help of the pointer and setter clubs.

In all, 2012 promises to be a big year for Glennoo and we look forward to seeing all our old friends, who 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.

To get more details on what we can offer you we recommend you to visit www.glennoo.com or contact Damian McElholm on info@glennoo.com or ring 0 (044) 28 41752444 / 0(044) 7808 096 472



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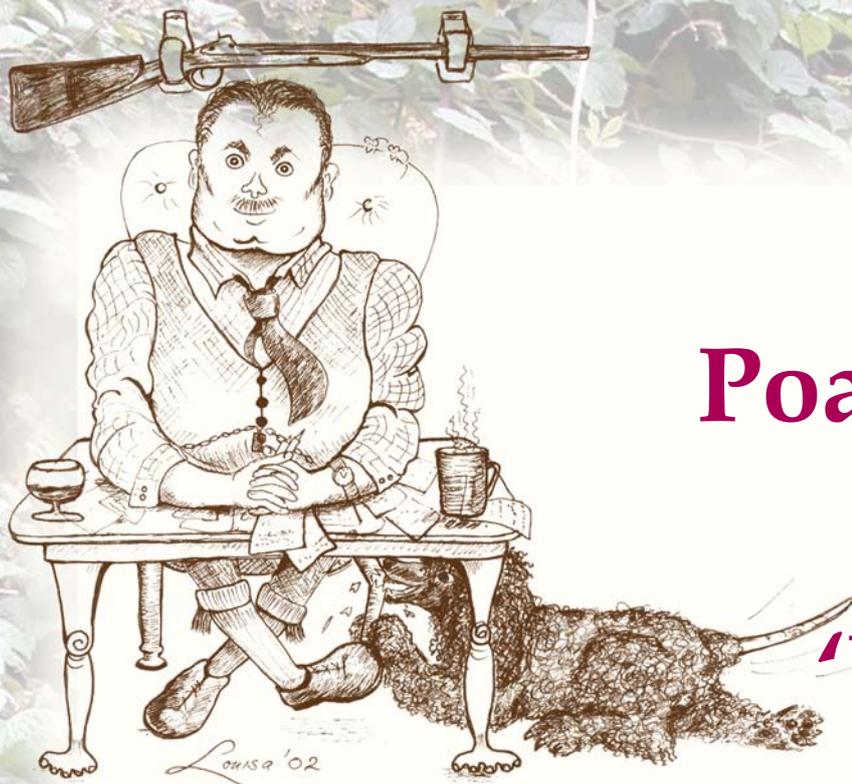
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Plus Twos Poaching and Other 'Dark Arts'

The lack of the infamous fireworks didn't dampen the Festival of Arts as Esso's friends made quite enough noise without them. A large fistful of free tickets had softened Sgt. Clancy's attitude and, along with threats of a drunken driving charge while in possession of a Garda car, had made him forget his ideas of multiple charges against Purdey, Plus Twos, and all the men, women and children associated with Woodless. How these 'pop' creatures keep going all day and all night is beyond me and I'd sooner have a hard day on the hill, or even beat the bounds of Woodless rather than keep up with them. Purdey found them just as bad, but he was more concerned about the hordes of strangers wandering all over his precious coverts. Now there wasn't much to loose in the way of birds as we kept them off Upper Woodless but, like all gamekeepers, Purdey never trusts strangers especially ones that wander into his woods. His sidekick, Mick Dillon, was thinking of his earlier life in the Garda Siochanna and only increasing Purdey's paranoia.

Eventually all these exotic creatures disappeared in the general direction of away and a level of peace and quiet descended on the wilds of Woodless, but Purdey insisted that we should keep our eyes peeled for any of the 'visitors' who might return having carried out a recce at the Festival. That's all very fine for a week or two, but it does become wearing after several months of having patrols and watchers organised as if we were expecting an infiltration of commandos over the estate walls in the dead of the night.

Dillon was appointed to work out various rosters under the command of Purdey and even Plus Twos was dragooned into leading one of these night patrols. We were fortunately heading into summer so the nights weren't the winter cold and damp that Woodless are

famous for. Of course it also cost money, as Purdey ordered up all sorts of high powered lamps and poacher alarms and enough trip wire to run a line to London and back. Every time the twins arrived home from school they were constantly setting off one or other of the traps that had been set since their last furlough, which had Dillon or Purdey or both driving across the estate at break neck speed with little or no regard for anyone's safety. On several occasions I found myself diving into the bushes to avoid becoming part of his Jeep bonnet and most of the farm staff threatened notice unless he was brought to heel.

'Lisbeth said she'd only go around the place if she had one of the old Major's war trophies in her hand and, believe me, 'Lisbeth is fearsome with a large spear in one hand and your morning cuppa in the other.

Invaders on the horizon

We had just come to the start of another duck season when Purdey sent a message that he needed to see me urgently and I presumed that he was looking for more money for feed, or was trying to wangle the price of a few more pheasant poults to boost the stock. If that had been all it was, life wouldn't have been too bad, but Purdey had a local network that would have frightened MI5 or the CIA. He'd heard that a well known poacher had moved into the area from Dublin on some sort of rural housing scheme. Now how on earth could you have a poacher from Dublin? Sure there's hardly a blade of grass in the place and not a duck unless you raided St. Stephen's Green or Dublin Zoo. I told Purdey he must be mistaken and obviously his contacts had got their wires crossed. In fact, I suggested that we should invite this newcomer to have a look around the shoot if only to educate him about some of the great traditions of country life. As a city lad originally, Plus Twos has

always enjoyed a little evangelism in the way of country sports and past times and strongly believes it is the best way to defeat the 'antis' – get your point in first and all that!

Reluctantly Purdey agreed and arranged for the new neighbour to call one afternoon so I thought we should show the hand of friendship with tea and maybe even a dram of the Elixir – just to get things off to a good start. Well, he arrived in an old two seater Landrover of indistinct colour as it seemed to be mainly either rust or dirt. Perhaps the army boots should have warned me along with the baggy camo jacket and the woolly hat, but you know Plus Twos is never the brightest at any time of

the day. He introduced himself as Griff Penny, who did know something of country life, or shooting life at any rate, as he had served in some foreign army where, as he put it, they fed him, clothed him, gave him a bed most of the time and even paid him! He seemed a likeable chap and anyone with some firearms knowledge should be useful in some way or another. Purdey wasn't taken with him despite his military service and Dillon watched him like a hawk in case he so much as looked at the plans of the estate, which were lying on my desk, complete with all trip wires, alarms and lookout posts clearly marked. I asked if he kept a dog and Dillon mumbled something under his breath about a ferret or a whippet being more

likely, but he said he only had an aged old mutt who would get lost in the front garden never mind in a field. The twins were quite taken with his military background and I could see they were looking forward to hearing a few yarns of far distant plains or route marches across the bleak landscape of the South Atlantic. It all seemed harmless enough and I told him he was welcome to wander up to the old pile as long as he didn't frighten the horses or disturb the game. Off he went and vanished from what passes for Plus Twos' mind.

To be perfectly honest, Plus Twos isn't very keen on unnecessary military manoeuvres and all this late night patrolling was becoming something of a pain. I'd rather be in my bed at a respectable hour, instead of pulling off my boots at two or three in the morning.

After all, we hadn't seen so much as the shadow of a poacher or had the whiff of a whippet since we began this caper but those stalwarts, Purdey and Dillon, were adamant.

There were other things to consider as our rector, Rev. Adrian Mullet, was on the



One of the alarms had gone off but there was no sign of a poacher.

hunt for further funds for some scheme or other and Esso had invited him round with the good lady wife and child in tow for an early dinner. He's a dear fellow and I do feel sorry for him having to deal with the Bishop, who is another dear fellow but completely different from Mullet especially when it comes to the effects of the Elixir. Mullet rarely finishes the second glass before falling asleep, while the Bishop can do valiant work with at least half a bottle even on an empty stomach. Well, Mullet wanted a donation and that would have to be dealt with sooner or later and things weren't going too badly what with the Australian Dollars and the profits from Esso's little business in the metropolis and he was more than prepared to settle for a couple of hundred and not torment me onto any more church committees. I don't really mind committees but when you have three people jabbering at once my gun deafness plays up and I usually get the wrong end of the stick and am then accused of not voting the right way. I often wonder why Mullet doesn't just get on with whatever it is and fabricate some minutes of the meeting himself. It would certainly save me a lot of time!

One of the alarms had gone off but there was no sign of a poacher

The rector's entourage were just leaving when all hell broke loose as one of Purdey's alarm guns went off and Dillon swung out of the yard in the Landrover at speed. Not wishing to seem either unappreciative never mind 'chicken' I jumped into the shooting brake and followed on. It was down the avenue with lights blazing and the ruddy twins shouting encouragement from the back still trying to keep up with Dillon while the old shooting brake bounced alarmingly when it wasn't actually skidding. I could see a visit to the local garage heading my way and what happened if we really caught someone? I would have to explain yet again to Justice Delacey why we had the place set up like Colditz. Just as we approached Purdey's rearing pen down by the 'lake' there was a scatter of birds which was like being strafed as they came out low across the bonnet. Certainly one of the alarms had gone off but there was no sign of a poacher but Purdey was puffing and panting and trying to explain that the blighter had made it to the wall and away before he could nab him. Of course this only strengthened his case for all the precautions and, while he didn't see who our poacher was, he was convinced it was Penny but how was he going to prove it?

Penny seems to live a rather easy life on the edge of Woodless village, not too far from the pub and walks his rather elderly dog each morning for his paper and a bottle of milk and 'has not come to the notice of the Gardai' according to Supt. Farlow but that doesn't

satisfy either Purdey or Dillon. I asked Tierney if he knew anything about Penny but he just said that he had met him at the occasional horse fair and saw no harm in him. Of course, Tierney is never too friendly with the game keeping staff at Woodless, so it was no surprise that he wasn't co-operating. The only thing to do was to keep a close eye on him and an even closer eye on the birds on the ground. How do you do that with a very small staff?

Dixon came up with the idea of employing Penny even on a part-time basis, as it was an old trick of Aunt Irene that it was better to have them where you could see them rather than where you wouldn't have a clue what they were up to. What do you employ a retired soldier/dog breeder/ horse fancier as without either getting up Purdey's nose or onto Tierney's back? As usual, Dixon came up with a better than average suggestion with the idea of getting him to live in the old gate lodge and act as a general handyman around the place which would, at least, mean we knew where he was – well, most of the time!

Knowing how little Purdey and Dillon trusted him and how secretive Tierney was about his horses it was likely he would have little to do unless I could find jobs for him.

Now you know only too well that Plus Twos finds it hard enough to find jobs for himself to do without annoying the various chiefs about the place so what on earth could I find for Griff Penny? The only thing was to make him the keeper of the gun room and at least he could oil and polish the weaponry stored in the attics, basements and gunroom. It would cost a few bob in Rangoon Oil and new brushes and mops but it would give us the cleanest firearms in Co. Westmeath. Unfortunately, Penny had rather strict military ideas of how the arms should be kept and it cost me a small fortune for bits and pieces from, not only the local gun shop, but from as far away rather classy gunmakers in Birmingham and London. I have never seen such a collection of cleaning rods, phosphor bronze brushes, wool mops, jags and pull throughs never mind gallons of different gun oils, waterproof sprays and polishes. Certainly there was plenty of equipment to keep Penny from wandering around the wastes of Woodless but would it work out and keep poachers at bay? It didn't, but that is a completely different story.

**Plus Twos,
Woodless House,
Woodless Bog,
Co. Westmeath**



Curious Minds

Iam quite sure anyone who has ever hunted in our countryside, or even those who might prefer to just take a walk in the outdoors, has at some time seen evidence of activity, be it a freshly dug hole in the ground or a trail bent in grass heading into a ditch. Sometimes you can see tracks or droppings, which show that an animal has passed this way and wonder, "What caused that?" Well, we now have the technology to find out. Trail cameras were developed in the States to assist hunters, mainly deer hunters, to determine the best place to locate tree-stands. When a trail or track was found, a trail camera positioned on a suitable tree could tell if it was used by deer and even tell the time they used it. This information allowed the hunter to judge when to sit in the tree to have the best chance to get 'his buck.' The hunter could even see if the buck using the trail had a decent head of antlers. In recent years, scientists have also used trail cameras to survey areas to see what species of animals are present. Several species new to science have been discovered this way. Of course a photo by itself is not enough to prove a new species, but it shows that something is there and that something needs investigating. Television companies have also shown them in use to survey areas for animals. This has led to increased interest from members of the public who see the value of these remote cameras to see what is about for themselves. Due to this interest there are many makes now available on the market at reasonable price. Try Ebay! (Other vendors are available: Editor.)

I bought my first one many years ago to try to get some photos of badgers at a sett I knew about, which was located in the corner of a field belonging to a friend of mine. The area had a thick growth of blackberry brambles and blackthorn trees, with some tracks running through it. My first trail camera operated with 35 millimetre film and so was limited to 36 photos. But this was about all you got from a set of batteries over about five days, the length of time I left the camera in place.

The majority of modern trail cameras now operate using digital technology and offer the choice of still or video capture, day or night. Most use infrared flash so

the flash is not visible at night, but this means that nighttime photos are in black and white, while those taken during daylight are in colour. Storage cards can capture hundreds of images and batteries can last anything up to a year before needing to be changed. Practically all modern trail cameras also offer a range of user choices, still or video, how many shots at a time, how long to 'sleep' for. Naturally, all this including setting the time and date, needs to be done before using; it may sound daunting but the instructions are easy to follow. I generally use the same setting, which is three photos, and then sleep for ten minutes before



The stealth cam and its camouflaged container.

automatically turning on again. My choice of this setting has proved useful many times, after seeing photos of a rat moving around - wasting film - I decided on the ten minute sleep period. If you use bait, such as peanut butter, you will get many photos of rats and mice, but you may get a pine martin.

You never know what will show up

And that really is the exciting bit: the one thing about using trail cameras is you get a surprise nearly every time you use it. I was flicking through a batch of photos of rats in a patch of clear ground under brambles, when I came across a nice photo of a woodcock, and the landowner did not know he had woodcock on his land. And that is the great thing about trail cameras, you cannot be certain exactly what will show up.



Out for a stroll: the camera can help show if birds are wandering too far away.

I have wasted a lot of film on vermin and suchlike and upon close examination of the photographs, showed that a mouse had entered the frame and was moving around triggering the shots. Birds also set them off and often are out of frame when the camera actually still goes off. I have hundreds photos of bits of pigeon's wings! Another thing that I have found at nearly every spot I have set up is that at some stage a domestic cat will walk

through - but you never know what else is to be caught on camera.

A Macnab?

Once I set up where something had been digging in a ditch. I had the camera aimed along the headland beside the ditch. I got a Polish farm worker, a fine cock pheasant, a rabbit, a young fox and a hedgehog. Now what sort of a Macnab is that called? Always surprises. On another occasion I set up, watching over a badger sett, and threw a few peanuts about hoping to see some badgers eating them. When I examined the prints I saw a badger, but next evening a couple of men armed with snares walked about the large sett. The following day they were back with more snares and a rifle. It turned out they were Department of Agriculture officials conducting licensed badger culling, but if they had not...

As the camera needs to be visible theft is always a concern. I had a friend make a steel box for mine, which I can lock to a tree and covered with camo duct tape it is hard to see when set up correctly. All trail cameras are weatherproof so can be left outdoors in all kinds of

weather, and nowadays there are a whole variety of trail cameras available for a wide range of prices. The latest have built in viewers to allow you to see the photos without even having to bring the card to a laptop or PC to see them. They have also improved greatly regarding battery usage and the size has shrunk to just about six inches by four. My first one was like a big box compared to that.

I would advise to get the best you can afford, but I would warn that using them can become addictive as they allow an insight into what happens in your area, twenty-four hours a day and are great for security of any area too. But remember, it is very important to make sure that the camera is well concealed and to use an infra red flash system, or your camera may well have disappeared along with your pheasant poults!



Just some of the shots that show who came calling after dark.



Hunting Roundup

North Down Hunt

Killultagh Old Rock and Chichester

The Killultagh Old Rock and Chichester Hunt held their Christmas meet at the kennels on a cold, sometimes blustery Christmas Eve. This was my first visit to the Killultaghs since the arrival of Gary Clugston to join Mrs Frank Boyd in the mastership though he was overshadowed, on the day, by his daughter Sophie (8). She was to the fore all day at one time galloping to catch huntsman Tim Taylor's horse! Like her father Sophie has a great deal to offer her new Hunt.

A small field under Mrs Frank Boyd could not wait to be on the move and followed Tim Taylor who, assisted by Chris Sterling and Patrick Grinter, took a 13 1/2 couple mixed pack out onto Leathemstown Road and the first draw in the kennel's lower field.

Tim Taylor drew towards David Ireland's and across Knockcairn Road putting a fox afoot behind Carlisle Reid's at Knockcairn townland. Here Geoff Porter was instrumental in getting everyone out of some very deep going and back onto Knockcairn Road.

This fox ran towards Ballydonaghy and on to Tullyrusk in what appeared to be very moderate scenting conditions. Hounds, when we could hear them, were in good voice but, with occasionally blustery wind, had difficulty keeping in touch with their fox. They did, however, work very hard to recover the line each time they lost him. Hounds continued to hunt intermittently moving back to Tullyrusk and then Knockcairn where they went into the rear of Rachel Leader's. She was among the car followers and her daughter Ruth (11) was in the mounted field on her new Palomino pony Casper.

This hunt continued back towards the kennels then turned and made for Leader's in continuing unfavourable scenting conditions. At this stage the

temperature was mild and several members of the field later told me that they and their horses had got quite hot as they tried to stay in touch with hounds.

A day which saw hounds perform with tenacity and perseverance throughout had left them largely unsighted to us car followers but the field, especially Sophie Clugston and Ruth Leader, had certainly enjoyed themselves. The fact that this 11 am meet had ended in a mid afternoon finish only sharpened everyone's appetite for the next meet. Sophie Clugston's day ended when Tim Taylor handed over her first walk, Bodkin, which I have no doubt Sophie will bring on in the right way so that the whelp will, like Sophie, mature into a very useful asset to the Hunt.

County Down Hunt

The County Down Hunt's Boxing Day meet, having not taken place for the last two years, went ahead in surprisingly mild weather though with some blustery winds. A number of people at the meet commented that last years temperature was -18C while this year's was 12C giving an overall difference of 30 degrees!

Some ninety horses and ponies first paraded through Ballynahinch town centre, being appreciatively sent off by a large crowd, then followed huntsman Steve Collins and amateur whipper-in Mr Ossie Jamieson onto Downpatrick Road. Here hounds were laid on and set off at a very fast pace across country towards Raleagh.

There were some fallers, happily without injuries everyone enjoying soft, if muddy, landings as the fast pace was maintained as far as Drumconagher.

As hounds left Raleagh, still at speed, they encountered an electric fence which had inadvertently been left on so Steve Collins had a lot to do, having lifted

them, to get them back on track and some further fast cross country work ended with more fallers but, again, no injuries resulted.

The field had by now thinned considerably and, having experienced mild even warm weather with blustery winds, we now had some light rainfall so home was blown in mid afternoon to end a fast, furious day.

East Antrim Hunt

The East Antrim Hunt held their Children's Meet at the Five Corners Inn at Ballyeaston, outside Ballyclare, on the last Thursday in December but the weather let us down offering incessant rain and biting coldness throughout for the twenty strong field.

Huntsman Patrick Headdon had on a 15 1/2 couple mixed pack and was assisted by amateur whipper-in Mr Mark McCullough. He did not hang about, quickly moving off to the first draw at Trenchill Road overlooking Ballyclare which could be clearly seen to be greatly increasing in size.

Here hounds did get some reward for their hard work but they could not push their pilot out into the open so the huntsman lifted them and moved to Springhill Road which was blank.

A move to the top side of Ballyclare Golf Club, where a number of hardy souls looked even wetter than the mounted field, proved no more successful despite the huntsman drawing right across Rashee.

Perseverance on the part of the huntsman and his hounds proved to no avail so the field, having proved that they could survive numerous falls on surprisingly firm ground which was wet only on the surface, did not demur when home was blown in mid afternoon to allow everyone to return to the meet and dry off.

Prominent for most of the day was former amateur whipper-in Mr Robbie Hodge and his stepdaughter, Kaitlyn (6) who was on a lead rein. Her desire to be up

with the action ensured that Robbie had to rim like he has never run before!

No one seemed to mind the soaking they had received as all the talk afterwards was of the next meet on New Year's Eve! Just as it should be!

North Down Hunt

A bitterly cold Monday greeted the North Down Hunt at their New Year's Day meet in the picturesque village of Crawfordsburn.



Terence McKeag, a former master of the North Down Hounds, with the hounds at Crawfordsburn

The Old Crawfordsburn Inn is the established venue for this meet and proprietor Mr Danny Rice, with his sons Paul and Garvin, as usual pulled out all the stops with a Hunt breakfast, a stirrup cup and, afterwards, a very welcome hot stew meal. As the stirrup cup was being served Mr Raymond Mitchell MFH addressed the large crowd and thanked them, the PSNI and the Inn for their contribution to the day.

Huntsman Tom Haddock, assisted by amateur whippers-in Charlie McPoland and Barry Jones, then lead his 15 1/2 couple mixed pack off, followed by a sixty strong mounted field, through the village to a very warm round of applause.

Tom Haddock first drew Meadow Way, on the Clandeboye Estate, then Cheatley's and Goombs's both of which proved blank. He had no better luck at Roland Johnston's or McCann's though here, at least, the field got some fences to jump. Things did not improve at Wesley Henderson's and by the time Ian McFarland's, Brann's and John Ritchie's had also proved



The East Antrim Hounds in heavy ground overlooking the growing town of Ballyclare.

blank even some of the field had begun to feel the cold though only a few withdrew. Several falls had been sustained with Johnny Boyd being the most seriously injured, his collision with a tree necessitating his removal to hospital.

Hounds and huntsmen did get their reward, as in previous years, at Hughes's where this year a brace went afoot. Hounds settled on one customer and pushed him towards Cultra, then Ballyrobert where he was lost in poor scenting conditions and very heavy going after a fast but all too brief hunt.

At this stage it was decided to blow for home before light faded so, with further good work on the part of the PSNI, everyone headed back across the main Belfast to Bangor Road for the greatly appreciated bowls of stew.

It was encouraging to see so many farmers personally greet the Hunt despite the very poor state of much of their land and shows the high regard in which the hunt is held.

An enviable record of continuity at the Tara Harriers.

The Tara Harriers, in Co Meath, have an enviable record of continuity in both their mastership and their hunt staff. Mr George Briscoe has been in the mastership since 1942 and the opening meet, on the last Saturday in October, was the occasion of the presentation to George of a decanter, by representatives of Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine, to mark his lifetime of achievement.

It had been intended to make the presentation at the Irish Game Fair in Co Offaly to coincide with George's 90th birthday but he was unable to attend so the opening meet, at his home in Bective, was a more than suitable alternative.



George Briscoe, Master of the Tara Harriers since 1942.

George's nephew Henry Smith, who has been in the mastership since 1992, now hunts the hounds and has as his kennel huntsman and first whipper-in Sabine Dowdall who is the third consecutive member of her family to fill that post. Her grandfather, Christy, did so from 1942 until his death in 1964, at which time his youngest son, Terry, succeeded him and he also hunted the hounds after George Briscoe gave up the horn in 1989.



Huntsman Henry Smith, MH with the Tara Harriers at Bective, Co Meath.

After Terry's death in 2001, his daughter took on the role and she has bred a first class pack of bitch hounds using Meath Foxhounds' stallion hounds, with occasional draft hounds from the Ballymacad Foxhounds. The 12 1/2 couple of bitches on show at the meet were an excellent vindication of Sabine's breeding policy.

Henry Smith moved off with both Sabine and Catherine Rothwell as his whippers-in and some fifty riders in the mounted field had David Wilkinson MH as field master while Henry Corbally MH was attending his first opening meet as a joint master. Sabine Dowdall had organised the meet on this bright, even sunny, Saturday afternoon but scent did appear to be at a premium and the ground was at times heavy and even cloying in places.

Henry Smith first drew Lally's but it was blank as were Horan's Wood and Leslie Clarke's farm but there was better luck at Donie O'Leary's. Here a hare rose and took hounds across Richard Farrelly's and Nigel Crowe's before going into Royal Tara where hounds were lifted after a fast hunt.

Weldon's also proved blank but a move to dairy farmer Gerry Reynolds's (a master of the Ward Union Stag hounds) brought better luck. A hare rose and was hunted around the Hill of Tara before going down into Paul Donnelly's and thence into Francis Steen's where, after another sharp, fast hunt, this hare was lost.

The going had been heavy all day and we had constant reminders of just how much rain has fallen recently so the last draw, in Joe Donnelly's maize field, having proved blank Henry Smith blew for home.

The Hunt has very strong local ties and is in good hands in the second decade of the 21st century, which is in no small way due to the work of the Briscoe and Dowdall families in the preceding century and they are to be congratulated on maintaining such high standards throughout their respective tenures.

Billy Vance's eightieth birthday meet

The Fermanagh Harriers opened their season on a wet, miserable Saturday at Scarva House, Clones, Co Monaghan with the Master, Mr V J Vance, having entered his ninth decade on the preceding Thursday.

Having entered the Mastership in 1963 "just for a year" this remarkable man is still hunting hounds, crossing country in style and with economy and giving everyone a lead in every aspect of hunting.

Despite the incessant rain, which had left so much of the country virtually waterlogged, a surprisingly large field of some sixty horses and ponies were out to follow the Master and a 16 1/2 couple mixed pack for a day's sport.

The first draw, the bog on the Master's land, was blank so matters moved across the hills and into Standing Stone, which was also blank. Things were no better on Olly McFarland's or on his uncles, Noel McFarland, or as Billy Vance continued to draw steadily

across Edward Hughes's.

A fox was then put afoot in Ian Keating's maize and gave a good hunt before being headed by a pedestrian (a walker in this weather we all thought?) and three couple stayed with this fox eventually putting him to ground alongside the river.

Once the pack was back together a hare rose almost immediately at Blind Lake and it crossed Keating's and Maguire's, going as far as Eddie Owens'. The pack, at this stage, were into their stride and they sounded well as they hunted their hare which looped through Eugene Clerkin's and then Fitzpatrick's before returning to Eddie Owens'. Hounds lost this hare at the Tin House back on Scarva House land and Billy Vance drew back across Scarva to Golanduff, where daughter and whipper-in Susan broke a gate for which her brother Johnny will fine her €100!

A move on to Cloncallick townland saw several hares rise and a number of hunts ensued on Cyril Rusk's land. The series of short, sharp bursts on these hares came to nothing and even Billy Vance had to admit that the weather had won and what seemed to have been, at best, indifferent scent had finally evaporated. At this stage Mr Rusk's four year old grandson was gleefully hoisted onto first the Master's horse and then Simon Scott's horse so that he, at least had a day to remember. Everyone had been well marshalled by field master Patrick Murphy MH and the orderliness continued as everyone returned to the meet.

Another young man to enjoy the day had been



Billy Vance leads the Fermanagh Harriers to their opening meet at Scarva House.

Andrew McCaughey who had been prominent all day on a good grey pony, Woody, who I was told has brought on a number of Fermanagh children. Other 'young people' to catch the eye were the Master's four children, his joint master Johnny, his daughters and whippers-in Susan and Clare and Andrew who cheerfully admits to being known as "the one who is a doctor in England."

Our return to Scarva House presented us with as fine a hunt tea as it has ever been my pleasure to have helped dispatch and this proved an excellent way to forget the weather.

East Down Foxhounds

A bright, at times sunny, November Saturday after recent heavy rain and with increasing urban development seemed not to augur well for the East Down at Ballynoe, Downpatrick.

In the event the small field, under field master Mr Pat Turley, had an excellent days galloping behind huntsman Declan Feeney's 18 1/2 couple mixed pack to make this an opening meet to remember.

Owner Noel Deegan, who has worked at Downpatrick Racecourse for some twenty years, made everyone very welcome at his bar, the Castle Inn, circulating with several trays of hot ports.

The stirrup cup having been dispensed Declan, with Mr Michael Smith whipping-in, moved off to the first draw at the Old Racecourse but this proved blank. The maize and willows at McNabb's, on the Killough Road, proved to have a fox which quickly went afoot. A fast,

circular hunt ensued with the field having to gallop to keep up. This strong fox set a fast pace as hounds pushed on hard and in very good voice as this hunt proceeded.

After a very fast final flourish this fox returned to the willows having crossed the Old Racecourse and run hard up Gazebo Hill.

Declan Feeney then moved on to Pat Turley's land alongside Downpatrick Racecourse and drew steadily across this area before putting our second fox afoot from Thompson's Bog. This fox gave another fast hunt which lasted for approximately one hour with, at one time, a three mile point. He circled across the old Dublin toll road into Polly's Bog then came out and went back up the hill past the Downpatrick Farmers' Market.

At one time a number of farm workers, moving cattle just off Ballydugan Road, apparently headed the fox turning him from crossing the Ballydugan Road to run back towards Bonecastle Road. He made straight for Ballykilbegs then turned left and went on to Dennis McAuley's land where he was lost.

Dennis was master of these hounds, from 1985-1993 and, having also bred "Brave Inca," would have been delighted with the performance of horses and hounds today.

Declan Feeney and his hounds worked hard throughout and are to be congratulated on providing such an excellent day's sport from such unpromising beginnings, with one member of the field confiding in me: "That was a day that I didn't expect."

The going had been surprisingly firm, even hard, in

places and there wasn't a great deal of jumping so the field was able to stick to more favourable ground allowing them to fully enjoy their day.

As we moved through November the weather remained relatively mild and days like this are to be savoured lest the weather suddenly deteriorates and hunting is forced to mark time.



East Down Joint Master Craig Cavan and huntsman Declan Feeney share a 'warmer' at their opening meet at Downpatrick

Art and Antiques

Just when things on the economic scene appear to a bit bleak along comes a glimmer of sunshine.

Now we are being told the changing fortunes of the Chinese are going to help revive things in this part of the world. Apparently shipments of antiques going to China are making as much as thirty times their value in the United Kingdom. This, it would seem, is helping to bring new life to trade in Georgian and Victorian furniture items. If the Chinese are so fascinated with what they are finding on The British mainland I'm sure there must be antique items of interest for them in Irish sales-houses. That is indeed good news when many parts of the Antiques trade are still struggling to recover from a slump started a decade ago when American Interest went into decline. Television auctioneer Tom Keane whose West London Chiswick auction business has been having dealings with Chinese customers for quite a time says: "This is the shot in the arm the industry needs now. The Chinese love everything from pocket watches to oak-panelled book cases and they are prepared to pay thousands for them." He cites an instance where a 20ft container filled with almost £12,000 worth of antiques went to a Chinese contact before Christmas

and in a short time a third of the stock had been sold for over £30,000. Among items sold were six Victorian nursing chairs which cost £600 but were sold at £16,800 and two £500 Victorian mahogany dining tables which made £9,000. Of course the Chinese have always admired craftsmanship and that helps in the selling of such items.



Gold pocket watch and chain, mentioned in James Joyce's Ulysses, sold for €60,000 at ADAMS.

DOWN SOUTH

Looking back over the past year, Ian Whyte of Dublin-based Whytes, says: "Our auction turnover was within 10,000 euros of last year's €3.5m. This is a distinctly encouraging sign, as turnover had steadily fallen from 2007 to 2009 and we would see this as the bottoming out of the market. We definitely saw many more collectors in the saleroom and on the internet during the past year providing more competition and a slight increase in hammer prices for many works. We achieved our highest price on the internet with the sale of Paul Henry's Altan Lough for €75,000 to a collector in California. We will be actively seeking an increase in consignments to auction this year and would hope to get a fair share of the NAMA and other liquidations provided a fair and transparent tendering system is put into place.

"We would also feel that many prospective sellers who have been postponing a commitment to auction for the past few years will see the renewed confidence to consign this year. Provided interest rates remain low, and the lack of confidence in property and equities remains, we feel that the art market will benefit from those seeking a tangible asset of enduring beauty and value. We have seen increased demand from North America and Great Britain and we will be actively marketing to these old export markets as well as other areas of the globe where there is a rich Irish diaspora and therefore potential collectors."

WHYTE'S top five art results were: Paul Henry's West of Ireland landscape, €106,000 ; Sean Keating's Playboy of the



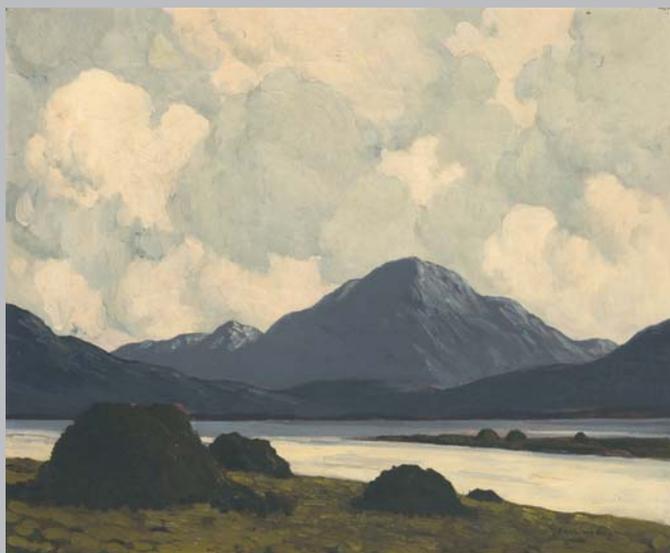
'Jazz Babies' which made €480,000 at ADAMS



€97,000 at ADAMS for an important Paul Henry painting, 'Wind Blown Trees'.



'Evening, Kildare,' sold for €36,000 at ADAMS.



'Altan Lough, Donegal' sold by WHYTE'S for €75,000.



'The Street in Shadow' sold for €72,000 at WHYTE'S.

Western World illustration which made €41,000; Two Jack Yeats paintings at €110,000 euros and €72,000; and Henry's Altan Lough, which sold at €75,000.

The top five collectibles were: Robert Emmet's Proclamation €25,000; Viking Dublin silver penny €12,000; 1895 GAA All Ireland medal €9,500; IRA Thompson machine gun €7,200 euros and a scarce Lady Lavery ten pounds note €6,000. Among the 'surprises' at the sale were: Ciaran Clare's Moonlight Night painting which while estimated at €500 went for €2,600; a collection of photographs of Doninic McGlinchy estimated at €700 which made €4,200 while John Ernest Breun's painting, 'Tired out,' estimated at €800, sold for €8,500 or eight times the artist's previous highest record.

HIGH PRICES AT ADAMS

ADAMS of Dublin just before Christmas had an exceptionally successful sale which saw a collection Jack Yeats paintings - four which were rediscovered recently - come under the hammer for €698,000, in a sale that totalled €2million. The top lot was for the significant work 'Jazz Babies' which made €480,000 (hammer price). 'Jazz Babies', which was last seen in public over forty years ago, depicts a rare self portrait of the artist. The painting was bought by an Irish buyer over the telephone, who wishes to remain anonymous. 'Evening, Kildare,' which was formerly in the collection of George Bernard Shaw, sold for €36,000; 'The Princess of the Circus,' that was purchased by Senator Sean MacEllin in 1946 sold for €52,000 and 'The Unforgetting Background' which was last exhibited in 1949 made €130,000 on the night. 'The Water

Chute' was unsold. This sale of Yeats' comes just two months after a new Irish auction record was set for 'Fair Day Mayo' also by Yeats that sold for €1million at Adam's in October.

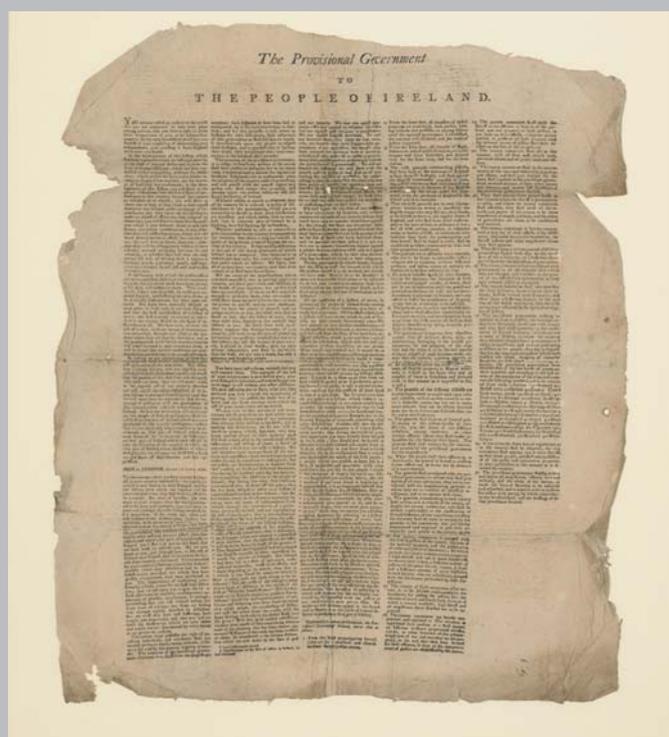
Other top results included €97,000 for an important Paul Henry painting, 'Wind Blown Trees', which was chosen to illustrate the catalogue front cover, and a second Paul Henry 'A Roadside Cottage' which fetched €90,000 - the latter was previously unseen having been bought at the Dublin Horseshow in the 1930s by a British collector who travelled regularly to the Show.

A gold pocket watch and chain, belonging to a past Superintendent of Prospect Cemetery (Glasnevin), which is specifically mentioned in James Joyce's Ulysses (published 1922), sold for €60,000 from a pre-sale estimate of €8,000-12,000. It was sold to a bidder in the saleroom, who was underbid by two others, also in the saleroom. The 18ct gold hunter case watch and chain belonged to John O'Connell (1844-1925), who Joyce described as the Cemetery 'Caretaker' in the book when Bloom attends Paddy Dignam's funeral procession.

James O'Halloran, Managing Director at ADAMS said: "This was a very strong sale, with over 80% of the lots not just selling, but selling consistently well, across the board. Clearly the market for Irish art is here in Dublin. A superb William Conor oil painting, 'Jaunting Car' made double its lower estimate, selling for €70,000, and a large sculpture by F.E. McWilliam made €58,000 from a €30-50k pre-sale estimate. The market for Yeats paintings remains extremely buoyant. We have noticed a surge in demand for his pictures in recent times, together with Paul Henry paintings, mainly because their works are widely regarded to be amongst the very best in Irish art."

IN BELFAST

Leading Northern Ireland auctioneer Daniel Clarke of ROSS's in Belfast says the auction scene has been a reasonably pleasant one during the past twelve months: "I think everything has realigned during the past year or so and there



Robert Emmet's Proclamation sold by WHYTE'S for €25,000.



This Hibernol Norse silver penny sold for €12,000 at WHYTE'S.

with a Jack B Yeats oil, 'The Casualty,' selling for £70,000 while a William Conor oil, 'The Road Sweeper' made £17,000 and a Frederick E McWilliam bronze sculpture, 'Sitting up girl' went at £10,800. Other top prices: James H Craig, oil, £6,500; Basil Blackshaw, oil, £6,000; John Vallely, £5,400; Patrick Swift, £5,000; George Campbell, £5,000; Markey Robinson, £4,500; Graham Knuttel £4,500; Dan O'Neill, £3,400 Gladys Maccabe, £2,700; and Wm Henry Bartlett, £2,000.

is a greater stability in the market for Irish art and I believe this has been appreciated by both buyers and sellers. We have been selling between 75% and 85% of the lots we have been offering at sale."

Daniel says many more collectors have been re-entering the market because they now considered there was 'value for money' to be obtained from it: "People are buying because they are getting value for money and I don't think they are expecting huge investment returns. Nevertheless they would want to at least get their money back if they decide to sell again at some time in the future. The present market trends will I believe continue during this year."

He speaks of the successful on-lines sales which ROSS'S have been holding over the past year: "These have been very successful and our sales from them have been running at 80-85%. Of course we will continue to hold our quarterly Irish auction sales but the on-line auctions are certainly proving popular with buyers and sellers: "While brown furniture still remains somewhat in the doldrums, good Georgian furniture is still in strong demand and so also is Irish and other silver."

ROSS'S enjoyed quite high prices in the back end of the year



'Tired Out' sold at WHYTE'S for €8,500.



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Does conservation without control see songbird numbers decimated?



It's claimed the sparrow-hawk population in Britain rose by a staggering 99 per cent between 1970 and 2007.

If some neutral observer was looking down from on high on the damage being done to the environment and its wildlife by raptors and predators while the vast majority of people thought that was acceptable, what would he or she think? They would say that either the majority of people were bonkers or did not care a fig for indigenous wildlife like songbirds, curlew, lapwing or meadow pipits. The fact is that the numbers of foxes, badgers, mink, grey squirrels, crows, magpies, ravens, buzzards, sparrow hawks and herons are on the up. Between 1970 and 2007, the magpie population in Britain increased by 96 per cent, sparrow-hawks, by 99 per cent, carrion crows by 81 percent and buzzards by 545 per cent. Now, many newspaper readers agree that things are just as bad in Northern Ireland. Over the past 75 years I have seen staggering changes in the environment and its indigenous wildlife at the very time when

there are at least 16 organisations in the country professing to be the friends of wildlife. Well, with friends like that vulnerable species do not need any more enemies.

I would readily concede that the majority of the majority are decent people who really believe they are right. But, lurking in the undergrowth is a body of people right across the five continents who have continued to rake in millions of pounds while they, quite shamelessly, brainwashed gullible people of all ages. I knew things were bad in the countryside and getting much worse but I became aware of the nature and extent of the problem only after I asked readers of my Saturday column in the Farming Life section of the News Letter to let me have their eye witness accounts of life as it really is in the countryside.

People whom I consider to be of outstanding integrity with hearts of gold, told in their letters and emails of seeing songbirds and swallows being slaughtered in their hundreds mainly by sparrow-hawks and buzzards.

They said that while they watched, sparrow-hawks and buzzards left only piles of feathers where once there had been thriving populations of swallows, thrushes and blackbirds.

Swooping at maximum speed

Pigeon fanciers have told how they could not let their birds out of their lofts because peregrine falcons were just waiting to behead them. You cannot walk more than a few hundred yards in North Antrim without seeing several buzzards at a time when the antis are telling people that buzzards and peregrines are endangered species. I have written previously of seeing peregrines 'setting their watches' for racing pigeons which were about to be released near Ballycastle golf course. Without fail, the killers would be waiting in the sky for the first pigeons to arrive on the dot of 1pm. That was a long time ago; I do not see too many racing pigeons being released now anywhere along the North Antrim coast. What I noticed was that the peregrines relied on being airborne at much greater height than the pigeons so that they could swoop down on them at maximum speed. In straight flights I saw pigeons being too quick for the peregrines.

Infected badgers

Fishermen have told me of new colonies of seals being established around our coasts with drastic consequences for salmon and other scarce fish. And farmers do not need to be told how badgers can adversely affect their cattle. Yet, officials are, some think, afraid to take on the great hordes of misguided people who cry havoc if a badger is killed, but they do not seem to mind thousands of infected cattle being put down at great expense. For what it is worth, my late brother John, a Ministry vet, told me that he was surprised to see how few infected badgers were brought in for examination in research programme carried out by the Department of Agriculture some years ago. He said to me that he found the answer when a field officer told him they were told not to bring in badgers from infected areas. Getting a viable and acceptable balance for all interested parties between raptors and predators and their prey will be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

I am reminded of an incident reported some years ago when a noisy gathering of do-gooders, railing against what they regarded as cruelty to horses at such races as the Grand National, allegedly cheered loudly when they heard that a jockey had been killed in a race. You simply cannot win an argument with people like that. I talk to a lot of farmers and fieldsports people who are only too well aware of the true situation in their areas but the do gooders have sunk their talons so deeply in so many ways that, quite frankly, they have created a climate of

fear in which many decent people are afraid to speak out. Thankfully, the response from Farming Life readers was overwhelming

We have a choice - either we stand idly by for another 60 years while birds like robins, swallows, blackbirds, larks and thrushes are reduced to unsustainable levels or we put sufficient pressure on the authorities in both parts of Ireland to compel them to authorise a programme of humane control of superfluous raptors for which there is insufficient food.

No money in saving robins and blackbirds

I had a rare insight into the thinking of the human 'vultures' when I was told by a wildlife journalist that he could not possibly tell it as it is in the countryside for that would drastically reduce the generous funding certain organisations were receiving. He said: "There is no money in trying to save robins, blackbirds, thrushes or hares. It is in exotic species like peregrine falcons, sparrow hawks, hen harriers and even the common or garden magpies that the big money is to be made." The sad thing is that generous benefactors genuinely thought that they were helping wildlife. Well, as I talk to people of an older generation one can detect the sorrow in their voices as they recall days long ago when our meadows were full of all sorts of wild flowers and butterflies, when our rivers and lakes and inshore waters were teeming with fish and when our moors carried big populations of grouse, snipe, curlew, meadow pipits and larks. They do not now see many of the species they loved.

Walking home from primary school in late spring evenings I could hear dozens of grouse calling as my late mother said 'like old men talking.' All the fields near the roads that I walked are now covered by poor quality grass with not a grouse to be seen or heard. As I indicated at the outset, those with a vested interest in ignoring the damage caused over the years won the battle for hearts and minds hands down. For some reason best known to themselves, organisations representing fields sports people did not see fit to challenge the propaganda that was being put out by the fat cats. If such thinking is a factor in the decline of indigenous species and the spiralling numbers of raptors, then it is surely time to challenge Brussels on the way it hands out money for the protection and promotion of the killers.

I have passed on all the letters and emails I have received to Northern Ireland Environment Minister Alex Attwood. They are all gems of accuracy and integrity hewn from the honest soil of Ulster; he could not fail to be impressed by them. What, if any action he might take, remains to be seen.



AJ's Angst

'lets off steam' with his frank opinions

have already honoured his efforts through the award of one of the magazine's '**Country Sports Lifetime Commitment Awards.**' His museum (featured elsewhere in the magazine) is truly an All Ireland resource for country sports people and those interested in Irish rural traditions.

Other awards made were:

Food category Champion: Clogher Valley Meats, Clogher, Co. Tyrone

Butcher Category Champion: Nolans of Kilcullen, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare

Village Shop/ Post Office Category Champion: Muckamore Post Office, Antrim, Co. Antrim

Rural Hero Category: Michael Martin, Vice President of the Six Mile Water Trust, Co. Antrim.

Two other rural businesses were highly commended: J Muldrew & Son, Markethill, Co. Armagh & Moate Meats, Moate, Co. Westmeath

Whilst our warmest congratulations go to all of these winners, I trust the others will not mind if we single out the two award winners from the Antrim area where this year our 50th Irish Game Fair, at Shanes Castle, Antrim on the 7th & 8th July will bring not only a local but additional national and international focus to the importance of preserving our rural businesses, environment and traditional country pursuits.

The award to Michael Martin also has some real synergy with our 'Year of the Salmon & Trout' theme selected for this year's Great Game Fairs of Ireland.' This theme will not only highlight the pleasures and traditions of Irish game angling but also the important work that goes on behind the scenes to protect fish stocks and maintain the health of our rivers and waterways.

Michael who is a committee member of the Antrim Angling Club, a member of the Mallusk Angling Society and an active bailiff for both angling clubs has done some excellent work for

I trust readers will not think I am getting soft this issue or that I have not acted on their behalf on some of the many complaints the magazine receives about all sorts of issues. It is simply because there appears to be so much good news about that requires my congratulations.

Congratulations to CAI 'Rural Oscars' winners

It is good for our rural businesses and country sports that CAI have implemented 'Rural Oscars' which complement our own magazine's long established 'Country Sports Oscars' – the Irish Country Sports and Country Life Country Sports Lifetime Commitment Awards.

Obviously the focus of the two sets of awards are quite different with our magazine awards seeking to highlight the work that individuals carry out to support and defend our country sports over a lengthy period of time whereas the CAI awards cast their net outside of country sports into the rural community and are largely local community based. The one exception this year being the well deserved award of **Enterprise Category Champion**, given to Walter Phelan's Irish Fly Fishing and Game shooting Museum, Attanagh, Co Laois. Walter's efforts have been made over a long period of time and are truly of national significance. In fact we

angling in the Antrim area. In particular he was very involved in setting up the Six Mile Water Trust in March 2010 after several pollution incidents in the area and he is currently Vice President of the Trust. Michael is also involved in an education programme with schools in the Antrim area.

The Six Mile Water Trust was established on 8 March 2010 to afford better protection, welfare, enhancement and restoration of the natural environment, including fish and wildlife, of the Six Mile Water and its catchment area.

The Six Mile Water Trust is a group of local volunteers from Newtownabbey and Antrim Borough Council areas, who have a shared interest in the future of the Six Mile Water catchment, its wildlife, habitat and stakeholders. Volunteers represent local angling clubs, environmental NGO's, local councillors, landowners and community groups, etc. The group is supported and facilitated by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. We feature some of the group's work elsewhere in the magazine and we are delighted to announce that they will be mounting an exhibit in the Angling Pavilion in the Fisherman's Village at the Shanes Castle Game Fair.

Firearms Legislation – Congratulations to the NARGC and the test case participants

We have a full report elsewhere in the magazine on the outcome of the ROI High Court action taken and funded on behalf of a number of test cases by the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC). Once again the NARGC has proven itself to be a doughty defender of the interests of shooters in the ROI and we salute the courage of the NARGC chief executive and committee in being prepared to underwrite this challenge and the skill of their legal team and management in preparing the case.

Our Editor has been following up on the aftermath of the case with both the Department of Justice and Garda and we hope to carry a report on this in future issues.

Paul has also been following up on the public consultation process promised 'later this year' for changes to our own firearms legislation. I understand that the representative bodies on the Northern Ireland Firearms Controls Liaison

Committee (NIFCLC) have already been consulted about the proposed changes including an increase in fees and when the consultation document is finalised it will be put out for public consultation.

While there may be many good reasons for the government to increase the fees I trust the Dept of Justice and especially our representative bodies will take due cognisance of the likely adverse impact this could have on our shooting sports and the gun trade. I assume that the representative bodies have already given a robust response to any proposed swingeing changes in firearms fees and will if necessary fight our corner and give a lead within the public consultation process.

Congratulations to Thomas Armstrong

A few years ago a young caster called Thomas Armstrong came to prominence through the All Ireland Game Fair Casting Championships. In 2011 at just turned 18, he not only won the qualifying events at all three fairs and the final at Birr but also went on to be the major prize winner at the CLA fair. It was a delight to see him presented with his Game Fair Championship Title, the Pat Burns Memorial Trophy and his cheque for £500 at the recent Dublin Angling Show.

Thomas paid a due tribute to the important role that the Great Game Fairs of Ireland have played in the development and encouragement of his skill and talent.

Sorry to end on a very sad note

News has come of the death of Jimmy Clegg, the founder of Feedwell Animal Foods in Castlewellan. Jimmy played a very important role in the development of the dog food industry throughout Ireland demonstrating great business acumen and foresight in producing extruded dog food products in Ireland.

My own involvement in dogs stretches back some 55 years and for much of that time Jimmy was a major player in the industry and of course through the Game Fairs we have worked with Jimmy, his late son Gary and his son Roger, current MD, of Feedwell for over 30 years.

I am sure I speak for everyone involved in dogs throughout Ireland when I send our sincere condolences to Roger and the family circle.



REPORT ON SIX MILE WATER TRUST FOR 2011

2011 has been a tumultuous year for the Six Mile Water, starting with a fish kill in January and followed by pollution incidents such as dumping of fuel laundering material, destruction of weirs and spawning grounds, two road schemes, eight hydroelectric scheme applications, a derogation to allow slurry spreading during the winter months, what appears to be a free-for-all in commercial fishing on Lough Neagh and continued predation by cormorants and mink to name just a few of the challenges facing the catchment.

We have been incredibly fortunate to have the support and skills of various individuals and groups to help counter many of these problems and we owe a great debt to Danny Kinahan, Alan Lawther, Paul Girvan, Gerry Wilson (NIEA), Jim Haughey & Robbie Marshall (Ulster Angling Federation), in fact too many to mention, but a special mention must be made for the robust and professional leadership of our chairman, Maurice Parkinson. Although there have been many issues on the river we are in a better position now to counter the problems and there have been objections, consultations, investigations and negotiations with the various bodies concerned and unfortunately there have had to be prosecutions too.

At a time when England's Environment Minister, Richard Benyon is announcing a £28 million fund to allow communities and charities to clean up rivers & lakes, our own, already underfunded NIEA is facing further cutbacks. There has never been a more important time for us to take responsibility of caring for our rivers, lakes and streams and the associated habitat.

Pollution

There were 29 reported pollution incidents in the Six Mile Water catchment, most being minor but with two involving fish kills. The most serious was discovered on January 23rd beside Ballyclare Waste Water Treatment Works but it seems that the pollution had gone through before the dead fish had been discovered. Despite exhaustive testing NIEA were unable to prove 'beyond reasonable doubt' which is the criteria for prosecution by the Public Prosecution Service but they have advised us that there may be enough evidence to take a civil action where the standard 'balance of probability' is applied. The NIEA has generally been prompt in their response to incidents and cases are being prepared for prosecution, NI Water was also fined for the previous years' incidents at Clotworthy House and the offending plant removed, modernised and situated on the opposite side of the river. Alex Attwood, the Environment Minister has pledged to be more rigorous in dealing with offenders of pollution incidents and his department are certainly imposing more fines for these offences.

Hydropower Schemes

The government is encouraging 'Green Energy' and providing financial incentives for wind turbines, hydropower etc., and we have seen a rash of applications on all the rivers in the Province with applications for eight hydros in the Six Mile Water catchment so far. The Trust had Peter Cole from NIEA (who approve consents) to give a presentation on the environmental impacts of these schemes. We are not totally convinced that the true impacts of hydro schemes are being fully assessed, particularly as NIEA refuse to recognise possible cumulative effects of several hydro schemes within a single catchment. Credit must go to Jim Haughey from

UAF for preparing our objections and technical responses to these schemes.

Road Schemes

The new Ballyclare relief road and the A8 at Ballynure would both have been having an impact on the river and we have had meetings about both schemes. The Ballyclare developers agreed to some conditions for sustainable drainage and access and green areas adjacent to the river but the scheme seems to have stalled somewhat so we await the outcome. The roadworks at the A8 at Ballynure intended to culvert part of a spawning tributary but after rigorous objections by the angling clubs, Trust and UAF this decision has been overturned and an open span bridge is planned instead.

Parkview Weir

Chain Reaction employees again entered the Doagh Burn tributary with their digger and removed Parkview Weir which is adjacent to important spawning redds. After an incident last year, they had been cautioned and warned as to the consequences of further disturbance to these important spawning grounds. DCAL have prepared a case for the PPS.

Lough Neagh

In a landmark decision the licensed netmen on Lough Neagh have submitted a letter to DCAL to complain about the extent of illegal commercial fishing and lack of protection for fish stocks. We have had questions asked at Stormont about the ability of DCAL to police the situation and UAF opinion is that DCAL is not fit for purpose. Further pressure will be applied as it is obvious that dollaghan stocks are declining and no further commercial fishing should be permitted until sustainability of the commercial operation has been proven.

River cleanup days

The Trust has participated on several cleanup days including the Mill Race Trail, Ballymartin at Mallusk, Rea's Wood, Rams Island and an entertaining day at the Antrim Forum when we discovered an unexploded missile and police sealed off half of Antrim!

Other activities

The Trust was represented at the Courthouse in Antrim and Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey for the South Antrim Fishing Festival. We also helped with a bat survey in the Castle Grounds and attended the training day for Ballinderry River Trusts' training for the Anglers' Monitoring Initiative. We have been told that funding is available for the Six Mile Water Trust to have training for the AMI which monitors water quality through assessing invertebrate populations within certain areas of the catchment, this scheme is used extensively in England and in the first six months of its' adoption at Ballinderry it lead to two prosecutions and identified other minor issues.

Lobbying and media coverage

We have had many questions asked at Stormont Assembly, chiefly through Danny Kinahan, on a wide range of issues such as Commercial fishing on Lough Neagh, discharges from NI Water facilities, NIEA policy and performance, Planning Service issues, invasive species etc. Issues affecting the river have been publicised on BBC Radio Ulster, UTV & BBC News, News Letter, Belfast Telegraph and Irish News.

Stormont visits

Danny Kinahan and Paul Girvan obtained an adjournment at Stormont during which MLAs from various parties discussed issues regarding rivers and water quality and we were able to meet Environment Minister Alex Attwood who will be coming to visit the Six Mile Water catchment in due course. Danny and Paul also gave us a very interesting tour of Stormont afterwards. Two days later the Trust were up to receive an award from Coca-Cola Tidy N. I. Awards for the Antrim River Cleanup which was received by Kathy Mc Clean our secretary.

DCAL surveys

The river would seem to be in a healthier condition than has been seen for several years with river water crowfoot flourishing in some areas after years of decline, good stocks of juvenile fish and more frequent sightings of otters. Two salmon sensor locators have been placed at the mouth of the river and at Muckamore. Unfortunately the incidence of net-marked fish seems to be rising, evidence of what is happening on Lough Neagh. More anglers are adopting a conservation ethos and returning fish to the river, this can only be an investment in the future of the quality of our fishing. Richard Kennedy from AFBI working on behalf of DCAL reports 'we have sampled around 34 electric fishing sites which showed really good recruitment of 0+ trout & salmon in 2011 with some high densities of trout fry recorded on the main Six Mile Water between Doagh and Ballyhartfield. Some excellent salmon fry numbers above Ballyclare as well. We did some work in the area affected by the fish kill in 2011 with Ballynure AC. I think good numbers of growing juvenile trout are a good sign.'

This year the Six Mile Water Trust has its own insurance, we have submitted an application for charitable status and NIEA have appointed Mark Horton from Ballinderry River Trust as a River Trust Liaison Officer to support groups such as ourselves. We have forged good relations with both NGO'S and government departments and gained valuable experience in combating the problems which threaten our river. Hopefully we will now be in a good position to improve the situation on the river. NIEA & the Trust have erected pollution signs at strategic sites along the river, please always be vigilant for signs of pollution and report

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F.I.S.S.T.A.

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No salmon nets in Irish waters – the way to go for 2012

Firstly, the newly elected National Executive Council wish all readers a very prosperous and successful 2012 season. At our recent AGM it was agreed to continue to approach and appeal to all clubs that have salmon and seatrout in their waters to register and insure for the 2012 season. While most of our rivers do not open until later it is important all your membership to FISSTA and insurance is in place to cover any accidents that your club may be liable for prior to the season commencing. It will be the most important task any secretary must do to protect their members and club assets.

Our outgoing Chairman, John Carroll, reported some good progress in his first year as a director in the newly formed Inland Fisheries Ireland body that has replaced the fishery boards. There are some members of the FISSTA National Executive Council

also appointed to the National Inland Fisheries Forum which we hope will advise and assist angling and club work into 2012. The election of our new Chairman Paul Lawton from Cork was a popular one and while he acknowledged in his acceptance speech that he had 'a very hard act to follow' he thanked the entire federation for wishing him the best of luck during what will be a very challenging time for us all. The recent SALSEA research programme into the mortality of salmon at sea tells us little that we did not know and put the losses down to climatic and oceanographic changes, with little in it that identifies aquaculture or commercial netting as part of the problem and instead stating habitat management as the key to address the downward graph. There is little or no mention of sealice or unsustainable fish farming practices as if these reasons were not a factor, but many of us on the river banks know differently.



L/R. Andrew McGall, Danny Kennedy MLA, Seamus Donnelly, Chairman of the 'No Salmon Nets' campaign and Robin Swann MLA.

Close commercial netting ASAP

We continue to lobby hard against all commercial netting including draft in the estuaries and the driftnets of Castlemaine. But the mixed stock nets off the North Coast which DCAL licenses cover are taking fish that return to all west coast rivers which we will not tolerate and support the No Salmon Nets in Irish Waters Facebook campaign giving advice and help whenever it is needed. The general opinion was that the fishery could not wait for an EU ruling on a complaint lodged last year by UAF. We also suffered a major setback last July when a mixed stock fishery in Castlemaine was reopened despite our very intensive campaign which we lobbied in vain all the way to NASCO conference in Greenland in June. We will continue the fight to ensure this reopening is not repeated in 2012.

New plans to increase fish farming

The power of the aquaculture industry heavily outweighs



Foyle anglers Mervyn Kinloch and Mark Gough meet Sandra Overend MLA.

the angling tourism and leisure industry as Minister Coveney seems to have convinced the cabinet that up to ten new fish farming sites be opened outside our NATURA 2000 bays to further out to sea off our islands. Their locations are likely to be in the migratory paths that will infest our smolts on their way to the feeding grounds of the North Atlantic. The message is clear from our point of view – the government must choose between clean angling tourism jobs or the present type of fin fish farming that pollutes to produce, thus damaging the marine environment for all other users. It is vital that this campaign succeeds as the consequences are a wipe out of our wild salmon stocks.

Better Insurance cover

Once again there is no increase on our improved insurance cover that further protects you. So, registering your club is the most important task to undertake in the year and it is better to do it as early as possible to avail of cover from Jan 1s. (See details on quality of cover.) Please be wary of any body that will only provide evidence and quality of cover only after premiums have been paid.

Stronger demands from clubs

As our clubs request more assistance to ensure local angling is provided for the club members at a reasonable rate, we must offer more so that every river has a club to foster the sport and conserve the salmonid stocks. To improve our service to your club we must therefore try to increase our income in various ways during 2012 to provide a more professional service. We will depend, as always, on the established clubs to carry the weak as our stocks still face serious threats and must maintain a strong



Billy Vance with a fine fish.

professional presence at national and international level if we are to keep making legislative progress with the issues especially at NASCO and EU level. It is the anglers support that will determine our success on issues such as sealice, stocks and scientific advice for 2012 onwards.

National Executive Council for 2012

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Paul Lawton is new FISSTA Chairman

The Salmon Clubs of Ireland at the AGM of FISSTA paid the highest honour to Cork's Paul Lawton, the long serving Secretary of the Lee Salmon Anglers, by electing him unanimously as Chairman of FISSTA for 2012. It was a very popular result as all other nominees in an expression of respect and goodwill withdrew in support of Paul who has served on the National Executive Council for many years. Paul's knowledge of club angling and river management is well respected throughout Ireland and his experience in many national salmon matters will stand him in good stead for his new challenge to lead FISSTA in the coming year. Paul was brought up on his beloved Lee where his father Aidan founded the Lee Salmon Anglers in the late fifties when angling was at it's best and salmon were abundant.

Paul hails from Cork City and has been fishing his River Lee since his childhood and like many rivers all over Ireland he is saddened to see at first hand the consistent decline in the quality of angling. "That is not to say that one can't have a good day of angling on the River Lee, but everyone will accept the policy of driftnetting, water quality and habitat damage has made those great fishing days less frequent for the next generation of anglers to enjoy," says Paul.

The last Chairman from Cork was founder of FISSTA, the legendary Jim Maxwell RIP, from Leap in West Cork, who championed salmon conservation and angling for over thirty years until his sad death in 1996.



No Fracking - Opposition to this method of mining which many fear will impact on spawning.

No salmon in Irish water/no season exemptions/drift (Castlemaine) draft: end exploitation by net and rod fisheries

This is by far the most urgent issue to be addressed by Minister Pat Rabbitte TD and Northern Assembly Minister Caral Ni Chuilinn MLA in the case of the North coast missed stock nets. The new regulations provide increased commercial exploitation by both drift and draft netting and for the first time an extension into October for some rod fisheries. This is repulsive and unacceptable to anglers who have fought so hard to protect our brood stock by calling for an end to all commercial net fisheries. The fact that the draft netsmen are unable to catch

the full quota proves how damaging this policy is at present. FISSTA will not allow the point of slaughter to be transferred from the drift to the draft net as it is envisaged that our plan to achieve abundance will not now happen unless the Minister intervenes.

Access to State Waters or Security of Tenure

Renewal of seven year leases as agreed and promised in writing forthwith by previous Ministers since 23 April 2002. Without security of tenure it is pointless motivating angling clubs to undertake remedial work in partnership with certain RFB's who demonstrate complete disregard for the voluntary angling sector. The attempted seizure of the Gweebarra River aided by local authority and highly paid consultants is a prime example of what will be resisted by FISSTA.

Fish Farm Pollution

With the allocation of additional state funds to BIM to fastrack new fish farm projects which we suspect are in contravention of the EU Habitats Directive which will infest our migrating smolts with sealice, FISSTA will oppose all efforts by Minister Simon Coveney TD to pursue the ill advised plans in aquaculture which increases sealice and pollution causing a serious degrading of our water quality. The damage to our marine environment is clearly caused by irresponsible operators. The damage to our water quality, angling, and tourism will be irreparable if this Government fails to act now by moving farm sites out of bays or to closed containment combined with tagging the caged and harvested farmed fish. A whole ocean approach to the management of our marine resources is advocated by FISSTA. Even leading fish farmers Marine Harvest have admitted that no cages should be located within salmon habitats. The way is now clear for our new Minister to get the finfish industry out of the bays and into closed containment sites where wild fish and water quality can be protected.

Protection

A Special Task Force from Garda Unit & RFB Back Up is

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required. It is time to show how serious poaching is viewed as a crime. There must be strict control of poaching both at sea and in rivers and estuaries. This autumn gave proof yet again that the fishery board staff have neither the capability nor enough funding to police and enforce the law. While we welcome token webcam pilot projects, FISSTA call for more funding of electronic technology such as portable webcams to be made available as a cost effective measure to minimise illegal activities.

No Hydro Electric Dams on Salmon Rivers

Hydro Dams impede the way of returning salmon and those that do make it up through a fish pass on large ESB systems such as the Shannon, Lee, Erne and Clady never get back to sea as smolts due to the turbines which causes huge mortality. FISSTA lobby hard to minimise the impact on salmon from State licensed fish farms, (sealice and escapes) mink farms, (escapes) hydros, wind turbines, (mud slides silt up spawning gravel beds) and forestry prove that there is little joined up thinking by state bodies when such licenses are awarded frequently along with financial grant aid.

Habitat Enhancement Programme

When fish returns increase, FISSTA need statutory help to implement their Salmonid Sanctuary Programme which basically ensures the work to create more spawning is fast tracked. Only the members on local rivers can implement this with effect and immediately.

Angling Tourism Plans: Visitor Quota Allocation

The delay in implementing the habitat enhancement tourism marketing strategy is due to the lack of investment in the product development. To date the investment has been in the promotion rather than developing the attractions first. Any creation of new angling tourism business will be dependent on the partnership with the local angling clubs who are the key ingredient of the angling tourism product. FISSTA can implement this partnership immediately and will be supported by European Anglers Alliance (5m.anglers all over EU) who has already endorsed the FISSTA Plan since the ending of driftnetting on 2 November 2006.

Inland Fisheries Ireland and NIFF

FISSTA have campaigned for the new fisheries management regime now in place since 2010. FISSTA hope to continue cooperation with the new structure and will use all its powers to influence a better deal for salmon and seatrout angling and conservation. A key objective will be to get all salmon rivers reopened as soon as possible.

Rod Licence Revenue

In 2003 the then Marine Minister Dermot Ahern practically doubled the cost of our rod license. Following refusals to purchase by FISSTA, it was agreed in principle by Junior



Hopefully many fish like this will have made the journey back home.

Minister John Browne to ring-fence the revenue towards salmon habitat enhancement plan to be agreed under the Salmonid Sanctuary Programme. These promises were not honoured and FISSTA still seek this additional funding to be included with the doubling of the cost again in the 2007 season with a 'Salmon Conservation Levy' which makes it the dearest license in the world. at €120. We are losing massive angling tourism business to Scotland and Scandinavian countries where the license is virtually free and FISSTA demand the scrapping of the rod license to remove this huge barrier to our sport and put it on the same level as trout, sea and coarse angling throughout EU. It is time to implement a better plan and to reward FISSTA voluntary members and clubs who nurture this habitat or sanctuary for the benefit of all future generations who value our wild Atlantic salmon.

No Salmon Nets in Irish Waters fight hard using the smartphone

They say the pen is mightier than the sword, but after six months involved in the No Salmon Nets campaign we can now say the smart phone is mightier than the sword. For over four years there has been intense pressure on the Northern Ireland government to end the driftnetting of over 2,000 wild Atlantic salmon off the coast of Antrim and Derry taking fish that were destined to spawn in all our rivers including from Donegal down to Kerry. At NASCO conference in Greenland last June FISSTA questioned the very weak defence the state department DCAL gave to explain why there was still mixed stock fishing was still permitted under license. The Moyola club under the chairmanship of Philip Maguire encouraged all to attend the pressure group meetings in Castledawson and it was at the September meeting it was announced by Robbie Marshall that Ulster Anglers Federation had lodged a complaint to the EU last February 2011 which would take up to three years to process. Many at that meeting were not prepared to wait one more season as was apparent on that very historical night.

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure came under intense pressure from the campaign organised by the No Salmon Nets in Irish Waters via the cross party support from all MLAs to end the environmental damage by not issuing licenses for 2012



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season. At a DCAL hearing in late February, officials from her department conceded that such were the very poor conditions of the salmon stocks that the offending nets would not receive licenses in 2012. While the Minister backtracked by avoiding to declare a closure of all exploitation both net and rod via catch and release, the announcement is hopefully imminent as we go to press.

So the question from Icelander Orri Vigfusson and many southern anglers ask us recently is who are the Facebook campaigners who cranked up the pressure to such a level that every public representative was fully briefed and lobbied to vote in favour of a salmon action plan as debated on 21 February. This was done without issuing a piece hardly a scrap of paper as the facebook page communicated most effectively with the professional campaign led by Chairman and founder Seamus Donnelly from Moyola Anglers and Mark Tierney Vice Chairman who founded the page last summer after seeing yet another netting season conclude with the loss of over 2,000 salmon to the wild rivers of the North west and east of the island. The amazing progress stems from the use of the social media which I discovered many of the MLAs were clearly using to publicise their work and achievements. It was a revelation to see how the very professional way in which Secretary Andrew McGall, Development Officer Willie Darragh gently applied consistent pressure to ensure all politicians supported the campaign. Robin Swann MLA and his advisor Stephen Nicholl excelled in their relentless pursuit of the case by asking pertinent questions on our behalf and by organising an information day for MLAs to grasp this issue prior to the debate in which over 5,000 signatures were delivered by Robin Swann to the Minister. Many MLAs supported the motion with 13 speakers including excellent speeches from Sandra Overend and Ian McCrea and Oliver McMullan along with seven interventions, all positive to the motion calling for a plan of action for the conservation of the fish. The No Salmon Nets in Irish Waters group is proof positive on how to campaign in conjunction with the federations such as FASTA, UAF and FISSTA in full support mode to direct and assist whenever advice was needed. Log on to the Facebook page and read the story as it evolved.

Visit FISSTA at Hooked Live! in CityWest Hotel and Convention Centre from the 10th-11th March 2012

While the Birr Country Game & Country Fair in August is the highlight of our year FISSTA believe that the Hooked Live Angling Show at City West Hotel is shaping up to be the most important early season show for the salmon and seatrout angler who needs to know what the season holds for 2012:

Why you should attend: get advice on where to fish rivers open and closed 2012: get per club covered for insurance; 2012 rules and regulations; new equipment and tackle launches; get advice on how to get your club waters developed via IFI grants; learn how to protect your waters and how FISSTA can

help your club or you; hear the latest news on campaigns to protect fisheries; support No Salmon Nets Campaign; learn FISSTA's summary of the NASCO SALSEA findings; and much more.

FISSTA 2012 Work Plan

Summary: no commercial netting drift (Castlemaine) & Draftnetting in Castlemaine and North coast nets must end now; and no season extensions - newly introduced rod extensions must end. All commercial exploitation taken by net and rod fisheries to cease.

It is now time for new government thinking following on from the buying out of the commercial driftnetting licenses of 2007. The protection of the remaining few wild Atlantic salmon is vital. There has been a long period for readjustment to see if salmon numbers recover, and from reading the commercial fishing press there is growing demand for netsmen to get back licenses to wipe salmon out for good.

2012 Regulations: 49 out of 141 Angling Rivers Open, 32 on C&R and 60 still closed - two less than in 2011 but plans and targets needed to be pursued by each club under FISSTA list.

Grants from IFI Habitat Enhancement Scheme: work grant aid scheme to benefit our club waters.

Angling Tourism Plans: Visitor Quota Allocation issue and print angling guide to increase revenue

Protect FISSTA access to State waters or Security of Tenure: Use our resources to secure this access

Fish Farm pollution: develop strong campaign for 2012. and sealice campaign to continue with lobbying alongside review of answers received from parliamentary questions.

Protection: we must repair failed policy on protection; and Gardai must get more involved.

No Hydro Electric dams on salmon rivers: continue to lobby hard - Kingfisher Project

More salmon clubs to join FISSTA for stronger voice - FISSTA to visit all clubs

Inland Fisheries Ireland: keep storing communication line open through meetings and attendances at National Inland Fisheries Forum.

Publicity: attend important shows

NASCO -SALSEA report: summary of findings and analysis from FISSTA

EAA - EU Anglers Alliance: continue Plan to extend FISSTA policy to other EAA members via NASF eg Norway.

DCAL/North Coast Nets gathering momentum: keep supporting Facebook NSN lobby

FACE Ireland: continue to attend and lobby for all country sports.

FISSTA support clubs to minimise afforestation impact: in line with FISSTA policy on the conifers issue, some key clubs were being consulted further to progress our issues.

FISSTA to work closely with FASTA on new anglings rules from Loughs Agency

The story of George

One aspect of fly fishing I find most fascinating is the sheer number and variety of fly patterns we have collectively invented over the centuries. Like the evolution life itself, in the beginning there must have been but a small number of basic templates. Then, whether by empire or by trade, these base patterns were spread around the world where they found themselves in different hands and were further evolved over generations on their new, local waters.

Trout are everywhere. Mayfly are everywhere. And everywhere there is Man, tying artificial flies, trying to suggest the living insect and to fool a trout into taking it as such. All these flies say 'Mayfly' to the fish, in one form or another, yet many of these artificial patterns can look to our eye so different. From a common beginning many fly tyers have gone on to tweak the designs and so solve the same problem differently. I have long thought that fly design is as much a question of culture as it is of fishing. The sheer number of different fly patterns that are available can be baffling, especially to the beginner. Ireland is a fine example because it has a rich tradition in fly design, with many big and bold patterns taking on all the colours and hues of the country's stunning landscape.

But there are fly fishermen who think they have found the holy grail and who will scoff at this vast array of fly designs on



George - is this a fly with the 'X' Factor?

offer. They will then hold out in the palm of their hands a scattering of half a dozen or so small - and they are always small - nondescript flies, and say that these are all that they need to catch fish for a season.

I must admit I feel a certain sympathy for such people, they have not yet managed to progress beyond thinking that fly fishing is just about fish. Or than hunting is just about the quarry. For I believe both are about far more than that. Hunting

at base is the pursuit of food - or the protection of our food - a fundamental human endeavour and once a very necessary one. As such, as we tend to do to all activities essential to ensure our survival and perpetuation, we have invested it with ritual. We adorn the tools of our trade to celebrate our very humanity, to give dignity to our struggle. Do the beautiful engravings on the side-plates of a shotgun make the shot fly any truer? Of course not, and we could be all be very utilitarian about it and shoot buckshot from a drainpipe.

But it is more human of us surely to celebrate it, to ritualise it, to show our status, to reach back into our vestigial past and say look at me! I am not just surviving, I am thriving! And I can provide for us all with some style too. I believe it is such primitive forces at work which inform the sheer beauty of some of our traditional fly designs. They can look like miniature works of art arranged on a hook-shank - but yes, they do also catch fish. Some of them.

OK, so our dour angler with his measly scattering of half a dozen flies on the palm of his hand may well be correct, that 5% of fly designs catch fish more effectively than the other 95% put together. But the question hangs: which 5%? And if you stop dipping into the remaining 95%, how will you ever find out? Such dipping is, for me, where much of the fun - and humanity - of fly fishing resides. A graph that showed the spread of fly designs around the world over time would make for interesting viewing. It would begin a few hundred years or more ago, with a very shallow curve, as a relatively small number of people travelled very slowly. Then, as transport improved, and trade increased, the curve would grow steeper. There must have been a sudden spike up with the beginning of a postal service, as people began to exchange patterns and views by letter. But it is now, in the modern era, with the advent of the internet that the curve must be climbing a near vertical wall, as so many of us exchange ideas and photos of our designs in the time it takes to click a mouse button.

Successful pattern

One of my own most successful patterns over the last few years I believe began recorded life in the 1930s with the famous wet fly and nymph angler and writer G.E.M. Skues. It was a March Brown pattern, and employed a body of heron herl and a partridge hackle. I saw a variant of this on an internet forum a few years ago - I can't remember which board, or who the tyer was now. But they had wound the heron herl in open turns, and counter-wound a rib of silver wire. I liked the look of the pattern, but didn't have any heron herl. But I did have some feathers I'd picked up from the shoulder of a Canada goose, so I twisted together a couple of barbs from one of these and wound them in open turns.

At the time I also found it too complicated to wind the rib in the opposite direction to the thread, it gave me a headache, so I wound the silver rib in between the open turns of herl. Then I spit the thread and with a few strands of red wool created a thorax, then tied off the hackle and the job was done. This proved to be a superb fish-catching fly, particularly in early to mid season. Throw it into the river and it was odds on that when it came out it would have a trout fastened to the end of it. I tied a few up for friends, and they had the same kind of success. I called the fly George, George the spider.

The editor of this magazine, Paul Pringle, ordered some of these from me last season. He fished it with



It is a simple but highly effective fly.

extraordinary success on his Six Mile River. Most of my fishing is on a small stream and I often fish just a single fly, or maybe with one dropper. But Paul fishes a team of three and it was George who was consistently picked out. (On one day out-fishing anything else my fishing partner could cast by no less than 12 to one. Yes, 12 fish to his one of his! Other days it simply caught for me, with a Griffiths Gnat fish 'damp' on the top dropper and a Hare's Ear nymph on a dropper. Northern Editor) I don't pretend to know what the fish are taking it for, but I suspect it is one of the olive nymphs. Either that, or it is just one of those patterns where the ingredients come together and collectively shout 'something tasty' to the trout. But one thing is for sure - and I would look my dour angler in the eye and tell him this - it is one of the 5%, that's for sure. Honest.

If you'd like to try tying George for yourself, here's how:

1: Silk is Pearsall's yellow or primrose, well waxed. Size #14 wet fly hook.

2: Tie on partridge hackle (long) by the tip.

3: Tie in fine silver wire.

4: Wind in touching turns to a point just opposite the hook barb.

5: Tie in two barbs of Canada goose feather, tying in with touching turns for the length of the body to the thorax region.

6: Twist the barbs and wind in open turns, tying in at the thorax.

7: Wind silver rib in between the open turns of herl. Tie in at thorax.

8: Split the thread, insert a few strands of shredded red wool, twist, and form slight thorax.

9: Wind partridge hackle with a turn or two, tie in, wind back through the hackle and tie off with a whip finish.

If you don't want to tie it yourself but would like to have a go fishing it, either bribe a friend to tie some for you, or contact me through my website and see if I have any spare! www.anglinglife.co.uk



George was exactly what this delightful little Brownie wanted.

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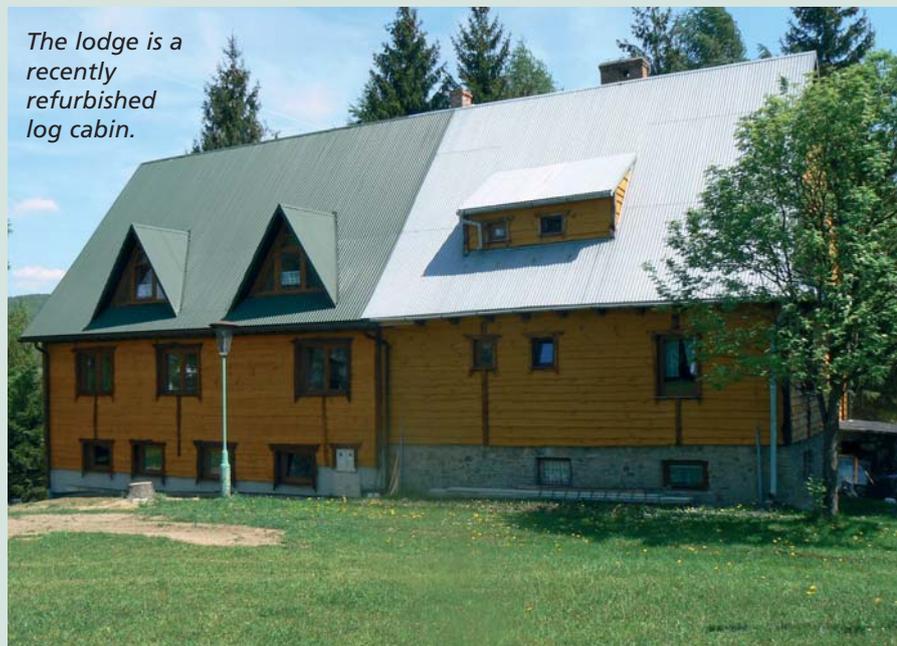
Fishing the San River, Poland

When you travel to a country for the first time, you bring with you preconceived ideas and perceptions. To me, Poland was an industrial and mining country with the vast majority of its rivers fished out. How wrong I was! I had been invited to fish the San River, in South East Poland by Jeremy Lucas, who had fallen in love with the area when he captained the English Fly Fishing Team in the World Championships in 2004. Jeremy had been helped on this first visit to Poland by Wojtek Gibinski, the owner and driving force behind the Bieszczady Adventure Team who looked after us on my visit there. Wojtek and Jeremy are now the best of friends and both share a passion for angling and the San River and Wojtek is a wonderfully charismatic character, who speaks superb English. He always has a smile on his face and nothing is ever a problem. He is a passionate and very skilled flyfisher, who looked after us so well, just thanking him here does not seem enough. He was assisted by his friend and colleague Richard who is also an excellent angler and speaks almost flawless English. To get there we flew Ryan Air from London Stansted to Rzeszow, a flight of about two and a quarter hours. We were met at the airport by Wojtek, who drove us to our accommodation about an hour and a

half away. The lodge is a recently refurbished log cabin with spacious en suite rooms which are basic but clean and comfortable. It has a large dining room where you are served excellent local food and is set on a good size plot with beautiful views of the surrounding countryside.

The area could not be more beautiful, on the edge of a National Park about the size of Wales. There is no industry in this part of Poland, with the majority of the land in forest and the rest farmed at almost a subsistence level. The wildlife in the area is amazing, with the last remaining herd of European Bison roaming the forest along with Brown Bears, Wild Boar, Wolves, Deer and European Beavers. Out of this area flows the San River with its crystal clear waters teeming with trout and grayling, but it also contains chub, barbel, perch and the

The lodge is a recently refurbished log cabin.





Wojtek strikes into a good fish.

elusive Taimen also known as Huchen. The San River is regulated by local government and has a 15 kilometre stretch where only catch and release is allowed using barbless hooks, as well as having nursery and spawning areas where no fishing is allowed at all. This part of the river is known as the 'no kill zone' and consequently contains a density of trout and grayling found in few, if any, other places in Europe.

Poland has suffered almost seventy years of tyranny and is consequently way behind Western Europe in its development. It is a relatively poor country, but that's all part of its charm. The people are friendly, the countryside is breath taking and the fishing is fantastic. What you have to remember is that the infrastructure is fragile to say the least. Do not expect modern roads or vehicles. When you turn off the main roads to get to the river the highways are nothing more than dirt tracks and the transport has to be suitable. Modern 4x4 vehicles do not exist here, the locals simply cannot afford them, so they have to use what they can get. We were transported about in a world war two Russian Army vehicle which certainly got us to the river, but I must say it was not the most comfortable, although it did add to the whole experience.

The grayling fought way above their size

I had never fished for grayling before so this was a new experience for me. We went down to the river on the afternoon when we arrived, in bright sun light and 30 degrees heat, but it was not long before I landed my first grayling on a small Goldhead Hare's Ear nymph. A beautifully coloured hard fighting fish of about a pound and a quarter. These fish just raise their spectacular dorsal fin and use the current to fight way beyond their size. As an out and out trout angler, I was surprised that grayling 'the Lady of the Stream' put up a harder and more determined fight than most trout. I went on to catch several more grayling



Applying some pressure.

and the evening was finished off with a super BBQ by the river washed down with a glass or two of wine. An excellent start to the trip, and everyone retired early after a long tiring day to dream of trout and grayling.

After a good night's sleep we awoke to another bright sunny day that was to be even warmer. After a hearty breakfast we decided not to fish until later in the day and so Wojtek took us on a short tour of the area where we were able to take in some of the breath taking scenery.

A traditional Polish meal in this area of Poland usually consists of some sort of soup to start with e.g. barley based vegetable soup, potato soup, cabbage soup - most



A typical quality grayling is safely released.



Travelling in style: our transport was a WW2 Russian army vehicle.

included some beef or sausage. The main courses are usually some sort of stew with cheaper cuts of beef or pork including seasonable vegetables and dumplings. We also tried various strange types of sausage but usually for breakfast - these included barley, oats and spices. We did not have any fish dishes but the most common are carp, trout, pike or perch. Sweets can include an apple type cake, doughnuts or cheese. This can usually be all washed down with local beer and vodka. So, over lunch, I chatted with Wojtek and he told me of some of the services that he and the Bieszczady Adventure Team can offer. These include canoeing, white water rafting, hill walking, mountain biking, 4x4 driving, quad biking as well as cross country skiing and hunting in season.

Fishing 'the duo'

But we were there for the fishing and although it was still hot and bright we were back on the river by 3pm. We

decided to fish the 'duo.' This is a method where you fish a small nymph suspended under a dry fly. The dry fly acts as an indicator if the nymph is taken as well as attracting fish to the surface. Fishing was difficult in the crystal clear water but we managed a respectable number of grayling and a few trout. We ended the day with another super traditional meal in a local restaurant owned by Richard's father.

The weather changed for our third and last day on the river, as it was cooler with good cloud cover and a nice upstream breeze. The trout and grayling duly obliged in these favourable conditions and we constantly caught fish throughout the day both on the nymph and dry fly. I personally caught over 20 trout and several grayling,

unfortunately losing a very large grayling

in the afternoon. It had taken a small

Hare's Ear nymph and I could

easily see the fish in the

crystal clear water. It was at least 24 inches long, which

would have made it well over 3 lbs., but the small

barbless hook just pulled

out. All flies must be barbless

or de-barbed when fishing the

'no kill' zone. Jeremy and Wojtek

caught numerous grayling between

3/4lb to 2lb throughout the day, showing the

river's potential in good angling conditions.

Summing up the amazing experience, the trip was not only about fishing a stunningly beautiful river teaming with trout and grayling, but also about taking in the wild and unspoilt scenery, the excellent local food and enjoying meeting the friendly people. I must thank everyone on this trip - I enjoyed the company and the whole experience, but I would especially like to thank Jeremy, Wojtek and Richard and I will look forward to

returning to the San River in the future.

Mark Patterson, APGAI, GAIA Membership Secretary is a Loop Pro Guide and Instructor. If you require any information on fishing the San please contact Mark at mark@wherewisemenfish.com.



The area could not be more beautiful, on the edge of a National Park about the size of Wales.

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APGAI - setting new standards in Irish Game Angling



Broadcaster Chris Tarrant in action.

The Association of Professional Game Angling Instructors Ireland (APGAI) has just celebrated its tenth birthday and is expanding rapidly throughout Ireland. It began life in October 2001, as its founders felt that Ireland should have its own, properly constituted and insured, governing body for Game Angling Instructors which would develop and maintain the highest international standards.

Today, they are able to offer a unique insurance package for instructors and guides which covers members for all public, employee and professional liability as professionals (as opposed to recreational schemes) and are one of the few bodies whose members are properly cleared to work with young people and vulnerable adults. This package is unique and purpose built for professional anglers.

From the outset the organisation sought to establish and maintain a very high standard of knowledge, skill and teaching ability for game angling instruction. A member may be qualified in any one, two or all three disciplines, but may only teach in the discipline(s) in which they are qualified. Assessments for membership of the association which are held annually are rigorous and demanding. The three disciplines are Single Handed Rod, Double Handed Rod and Fly Dressing. Until now the awards have been peer - assessed to a very demanding level but in 2011 APGAI introduced an

Open College Network level 3 diploma course in each of the disciplines and all future members will take this as their introductory level. This is equivalent to an 'A' level/NVQ3 or 'Leaving Certificate'/FETAC level 5 in the Republic of Ireland. In 2012 they launched a level 3 diploma for Game Angling Guides.

The interest in these courses has been phenomenal with over 20 candidates currently working towards awards in Single Handed Rod and Fly Dressing alone. New candidates are enrolling all the time, so APGAI expect to double their membership in the next twelve months. APGAI's advanced instructors hold the FETAC level 6 award in training skills and techniques and are amongst the highest qualified and skilled game angling teachers in the world.

Courses

The launch of the new Guiding Course came in response to a call by Failte and the Angling Council of Ireland for angling guides and ghillies to have recognised accreditation. Whilst APGAI does not subscribe to licensing for the sake of it, they do realise that in order to get proper insurance and to be able to comply with certain advertising requirements, it is a growing fact of life that professional instructors and guide will eventually need to have recognised qualifications. That said, they also believe that awards should be fit for purpose and value for money. Details can be found at www.apgai-ireland.ie under 'Join Us' for



Together with FISSTA, Irish Countrysports and Country Life and the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, APGAI is promoting 2012 as the 'Year of the Salmon'.

the various courses. On attaining an APGAI/OCN award candidates are given one year's membership of the organisation free, which includes the superb insurance package. They may choose to remain as members to benefit from for the very valuable and professional insurance scheme, child and vulnerable adult clearances and ongoing advice and assistance we offer our members.

APGAI also delivers significant training to schools, youth groups and individuals under the age of 19. As well as coaches having a level three award in the specific angling discipline, they must have proper professional, employer and public liability insurance, Garda or enhanced Access NI certificate, child and vulnerable adult protection training, plus training in risk assessment, first aid and much more.

At the Game Fairs

There are also free coaching clinics at various fairs,



Life and the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, APGAI is promoting 2012 as the 'Year of the Salmon' and are working on a programme of angling workshops and children's interactive art and angling projects that will be ground breaking and enjoyable for all those lucky enough to participate. See you at the angling village this summer.

In the coming year, APGAI hope to launch a few certified entry level courses purely for game anglers who would like to have recognition for their hard work and skill level. These will include health and safety on the water, casting techniques, a basic boating element for those who fish primarily on loughs and much more. Please watch our website for further detail towards the summer.

APGAI have instructor members in most parts of the country nowadays and if you want to avail of their services do please visit our website to check out a member near you.

festivals and other public and private events to help introduce newcomers to the wonderful experience of game angling. APGAI's attendance at Game Fairs in particular allows them to meet game anglers of all levels of experience and help them improve their technique, or give advice on the host of tackle and equipment options on offer in retail shops and the Internet.

Talking of Game Fairs, we are delighted to announce that together with FISSTA, Irish Countrysports and Country

For more information visit www.apgai-ireland.ie.

Offering a very high standard of knowledge, skill and teaching ability for game angling instruction.



When 'By-Catch' Means 'By-Kill!'

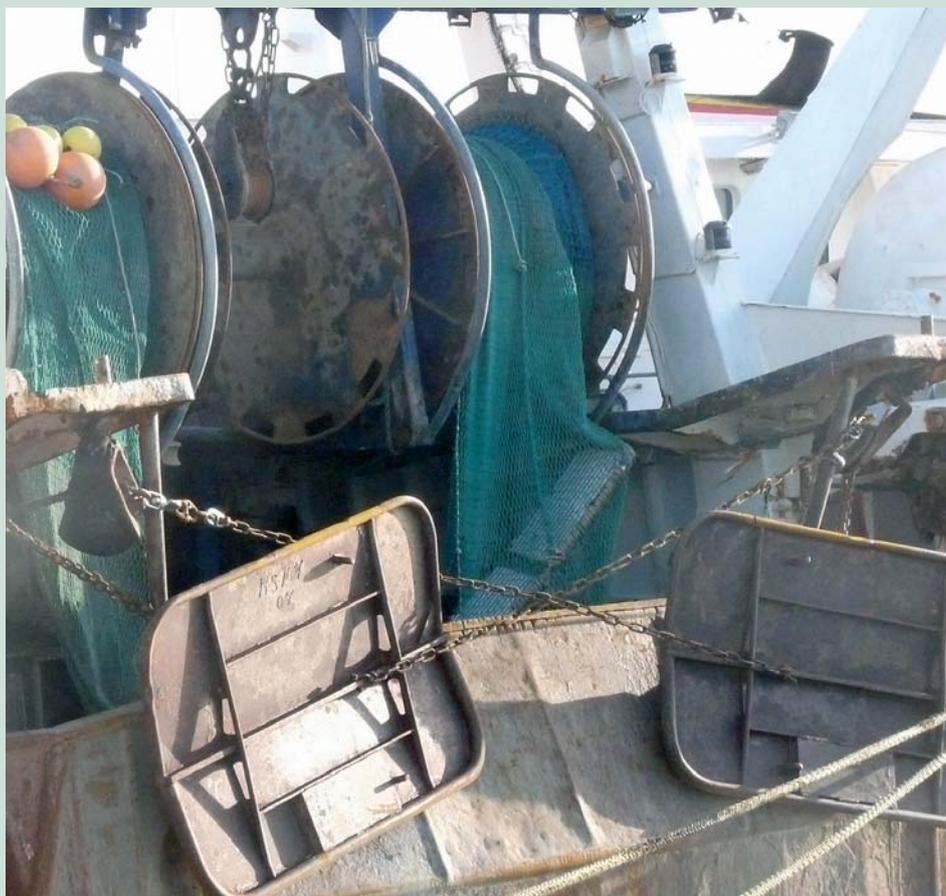
The proposed ban on discards is one of the biggest issues facing fishermen in the proposed reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The EU and the Commissioner believe that it is wrong to throw dead fish away because they cannot be landed due to quota restrictions or size limits. Their belief is backed up by the public and has been highlighted by campaigns such as the 'Fish Fight' to which nearly a million people have signed up. The majority of these discarded fish die in the net as it is pulled through the water to catch other species. Bottom trawling for prawns is agreed by all as the largest culprit, with by-catch to be discarded of up to 70% not uncommon, often it's more. The majority of this by-catch is often juvenile fish, which will not live to mature to either be caught and sold or spawn. In the past it was not uncommon to see fishing harbours covered in slicks of dead juvenile whiting, cod and haddock discarded

overboard with the prawn heads. The majority of fishermen will have seen this before the dumping of discards in harbours was outlawed. Having seen it myself on many occasions, it is a disgrace to kill these young fish in such numbers that the seals and seabirds could not eat them all.

Everyone is agreed that killing and dumping these



Whatever is used in the fishing process it should not lead to by-kill.



This is how the grid is hinged to allow it to go on net drum.

fish is wrong. The fishermen have known this for years but their hands were tied, as they could not land these fish without breaking the law. The industry is in agreement that discarding these fish cannot go on. The industry has shown that it wants to avoid catching these fish in the first place. Which is the obvious way forward. Unfortunately this is where disagreement enters the discussions. The industry wishes to rely on so-called Technical Conservation Measures (TCMs). By using TCMs the fleets can continue to fish. Many years ago the prawn fishing industry, in an attempt to allow juvenile fish to escape from the nets introduced one of the first TCMs. This was the 'square mesh panel,' which was a section of the net which did not close when pulled through the water, as diamond mesh does. The small fish could swim up and out through this panel of square mesh. At the time this was hailed as the saviour of the fishing industry, with a lot of media attention including film of the small fish swimming up and out through the panel.

In spite of the fact that these have been in use for over twenty years in many areas, fish stocks continued to decline. Various variants of square mesh panel have been trailed, placing the panel at different points in the net and using different size square meshes, the best results are around half the amount of by-catch is caught. This result led to the square mesh panel being compulsory in prawn nets in E.U waters ever since 2002. However, the photo of discards was taken as a catch was

emptied from a small prawn net equipped with a square mesh panel. Since the introduction of this square mesh panel a number of other TCMs have been tried by the industry to reduce discards, often these are used in conjunction with the square mesh panel. Of all the TCMs trailed and tried, only the Swedish grid has been approved under Harvest Control Rules and has been categorised as eligible for exemption from effort control (under articles 11 and 13) because nets using the Swedish Grid consistently catch less than 1.5% cod in their catch. Unfortunately this figure does not reflect how many fish die as a result of the Swedish grid. Nor I believe the very young fish, which are at the moment thrown overboard dead.

However Swedish grids, which are often used in conjunction with a square mesh panel, have a drawback, which is common to both TCMs. To expel the larger fish from the net the Swedish grid uses a metal grid to divert the larger fish upward towards an escape hole above the grid. The square mesh panel allows small fish to swim out of the net through the open square meshes. The very fact that the bars on a Swedish grid are thirty millimetres apart means that only the larger fish will be excluded from being caught. This grid earned its name as it was designed in Sweden to be used in deep water, which is not a recognised spawning or nursery area, there is no doubt that it does exclude adult fish. This is why it should be used in conjunction with a square mesh panel to protect the smaller fish.

Any fish with skin damaged or bruised is likely to die

There was much controversy in the 1980s about fish being damaged escaping through square mesh panels. Nowadays boats tend to trawl at a faster speed due to increased engine size so it is very lightly that more fish are damaged. Any fish which has its skin damaged or possibly bruised in the case of the Swedish grid is very likely to die within a few days, as its ability to osmoregulate - control of the levels of water and mineral salts in the blood - will be compromised. They will not die immediately. Fishermen have reported that if they catch a school of undersize Whiting they will die even if the cod-end is opened and they are released as soon as they are brought to the surface. Similar cases of mass mortality have been reported for mackerel with over ninety percent of released fish dying when mackerel boats attempt to "high-grade" or release fish when they are considered too small to land. Many studies have found that fish even slightly damaged are likely to die. Elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) have a different skin structure so have high survivability following contact with either T.C.M.

So while everyone agrees that discards are a bad thing, we must also consider by-kill. Those fish not caught but which die because of measures to prevent them from being caught and discarded. What amount of the 'unaccounted mortality' of stocks is caused by these measures? The industry wish to rely on T.C.M.s because they have gear technicians to employ and the only other

real alternative is to close nursery areas to trawlers, which they will not even consider. Unaccounted for mortality are the numbers of fish, which are not included in the catch statistics, such as fish eaten by other fish, fish eaten by seals, whales and birds, and also illegal landings of fish. It was when recreational angling was due to be included in the CFP that the industry pointed the finger at anglers take but timely lobbying by a number of groups including ourselves meant that the idea was dropped.

I am a member of the Sea Fishery Advisory Group of the Irish Seal Sanctuary and as such attend the northwestern Waters Regional Advisory Council. This is composed of two-thirds industry and one-third 'other sector' (non-catching) representatives. These RACs were established to get stakeholder advice into European fisheries Management. The marine resources of Europe belong to the people of Europe and these people are as much owners of the resource as the fishermen who make a living from our fish are. I feel that more emphasis should be placed on Marine Protected areas, where types of methier/gear should be controlled. We are not necessarily asking for closed areas. Rather than allowing the industry to try to find the answer that suits them, while allowing them to continue fishing using recognised destructive and non-selective gear, such as bottom trawling, which has already been banned in many parts of the world. More research needs to be carried out on fishing mortality resulting from TCMs in use today and if this means that the Swedish grid loses its special status then the long term future for the industry benefits.



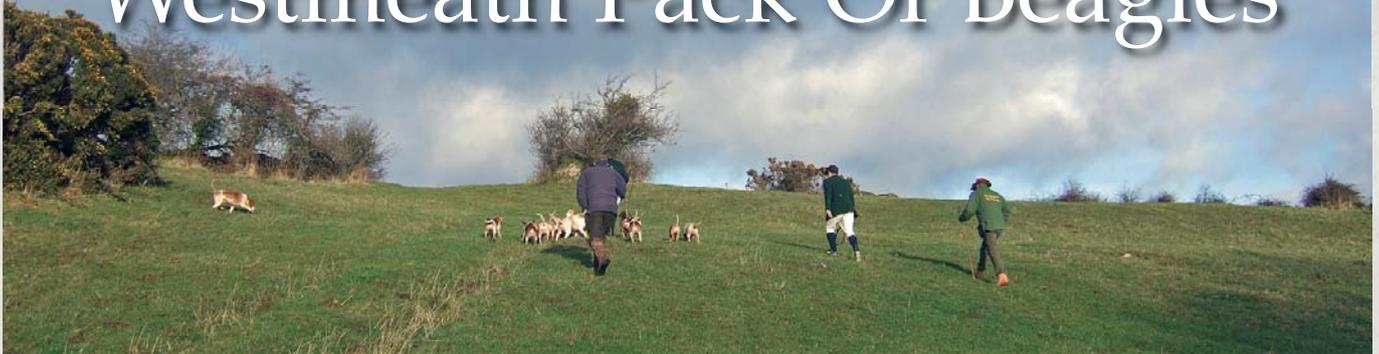
Here you can see how square mesh is used in this net.

2012 Retriever Working Tests

These dates are accurate at the time of goint to press

Date	Venue	Organisers	Contact	Telephone
3 March	Killadeas	Bertie Law	Bertie Law Robbie Cranston	07966644478 07894987652
10 March	TBA	Ulster Select	Johnny Rea	028 2589 8428
24 March	Larchfield	BASC	John Woolsey	028 9260 5050
7 April	Lakes Craigavon	NIGF&SS	Philip Turner	028 9261 1845
9 April	Killadeas	Bertie Law	Bertie Law Robbie Cranston	07966644478 07894987652
14 April	Delamont, Killyleagh	Killyleagh W/S	John Wilson	028 4482 8697
21 April	Craigavon Lakes	Craigavon	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
28 April	Shanes Castle – All entrants get a FREE ticket to the Ballywalter Game Fair	UGRC – Selection test for Shanes Castle Int. Team	URGC Joe Johnston	028 8673 6432
5 May	Ballywalter Game and Country Living Fair	Spaniels	Albert Titterington	028 44839167
6 May	Ballywalter Game and Country Living Fair	Novice & Open Retriever Tests plus Scurry	Johnny Rea	028 2589 8428
12 May	Dobbs Estate	Lab Club	Joe Morrison	07739 515200
19 May	Greyabbey Estate	Comber W/S	William Harpur	028 9187 3534
26 May	Moira Demesne	NCF	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
27 May	Moira Demesne	NCF	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
2 June	Cleggan Lodge	Moyola	R Kane	028 7946 8585
9 June	Drumcairn	Mid Ulster Gundog	R. McGregor	07900180005 028 77729690
16 June	Rademon	UGL	E. McIlwaine	02837552549
23 June	Ballywalter	Meningitis Charity	Eddie Moore	07799718963 028 9062 7664
30 June	Clandeboyne All entrants get a FREE Ticket to the Game Fair at Shanes Castle.	Lab Club	Joe Morrison	07739 515200
7 July	Irish Game Fair, Shanes Castle	Novice Test Dog & Gun event	URGC	
8 July	Shanes Castle Irish Game Fair	International and Open Retriever Tests	Joe Johnston R. McGregor Mid Ulster	028 8673 6432 028 77729690
28 July	John Agnew's Saintfield	Flat Coat Society	Simon Parke Bert Carlisle	07786435421 07860622426
4 August	Gosford Castle	Inter Club Test	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
11 August	Craigavon lakes	BDSS	Philip Turner	028 9261 1845
19 August	Dundrod		Larry Lee	0759259835
25 August	Irish Game & Country Fair Birr Castle	Prelim/Novice Retriever Tests IWS	Hilary Robinson	028 25880042
26 August	Irish Game & Country Fair Birr	Open Retriever Tests	Albert Titterington	028 44839167

Great Hunting With A County Westmeath Pack Of Beagles



The Balgarrett Beagles ascending the Hill of Uisneach.

On Friday the 21st of October last, I rang Kieran Lambert of the Balgarrett Beagles in the evening and asked him what date was the opening meet. 'It's starting this Sunday, thank God!' he exclaimed, and I could fully empathise with what he meant. The Balgarrett Beagles is kennelled with the Westmeath Foxhounds and they hunt every Sunday. They've been going since 2003. I've been out with them seven times this season and can personally attest to their cheerful, friendly nature and the excellent sport that they have been enjoying. Their first meet of the season was from Halston House which is 12 miles from Mullingar towards Ballymahon, and near Loughnavalley village. Stephen Powell from Birr was also hunting with the pack and on the first morning he very kindly met me at Lidl in Birr and led me to the opening meet which was one hour away and which was attractively covered with large stands of gorse

bushes. Therefore, Sunday 23rd of October was a big day for me because the beagling season started and it felt so good, after missing the previous season due to injury, to be again part of a group of country sports enthusiasts traversing the countryside following those charming, enthusiastic and extremely hardworking dogs - beagles.

Winter is my favourite time in the Atlantic Isles, because I love its moods and its smells and its sharpness. I love the smell of turf in the air and the souging of the cold wind in the trees. In my psyche when the season transforms from autumn into winter my instincts are telling me it's time to engage in very pleasurable outdoor activity whether it be rugby or hunting. I gave up rugby long ago (in my early 20s) and replaced it with hunting - I loved horses, was riding a lot, and hunting was the next step in my equine career. So many people at an early age stop exercising regularly. To me such a modus operandi seems completely unnatural. The human being is designed to exercise regularly and preferably outdoors.

I missed the hunting season last year because of my broken leg and it had been quite a while since I had donned my breeches, stock, pin and green jacket. Our first meet at Halston House was in the middle of nowhere and Halston House itself was a grand old pile, about 15 miles from Mullingar. The house belongs to Kieran Guinness of the beverage fame. Kieran wasn't there himself but he's a hunting practitioner and we were permitted to hunt over his estate, which was large, large enough for a hare to run around in pursued by yapping (sorry - speaking!) beagles.

About 25 people turned out, which is an unusually high number for beagling, and we were treated to delicious hot punch. We were offered



Whipper-in Richard Bonham watches the beagles as they exit the van at the beginning of a hunt.



We hunted across several fields, descending ever downwards from the hill, with the bogland and pastureland of Westmeath stretching away in the distance; the dogs sometimes checking, casting about, finding the scent again and breaking into a run again. Finally, we had left the hill well behind and we reached tar-macadam - here the dogs lost track of their quarry and Kieran

Ready for the off.

(Photo: John Fitzsimons) (after a three hour day) decided to

call for home. It had been raining heavily throughout the whole day - the following day flooding would occur in Dublin causing the deaths of one heroic Garda in Manor Kilbride and a woman who was tragically drowned in her basement room. In one graveyard in Dublin a bank subsided revealing a couple of coffins.

On the 30th of October the Ballgarretts were in Mount Dalton, Rathconrath, and the field included a government adviser and a heritage officer. The heritage officer has done a great job since she was appointed several years ago and her work has included preventing the falling down of our built heritage. Mount Dalton is a very fine house (it's a Georgian house and was built in 1784) perched on a hill and surrounded by noble-looking deciduous trees and overlooking a lake (the trout fishing is very good here).

The scent was not good for the first three hours but at four o'clock, with the dropping of the temperature, the beagles found and pursued the same line for the next three-quarters of an hour. We saw three or four fine-looking hares in the plantations hereabouts. The hounds made wonderful music when they entered a conifer plantation. Their speaking was somehow amplified by the woodland and it was excellent music.

In the last half-hour the die-hards among us who had not retired were rewarded with a magical scene

Three hares - or was it one?

The day was only ten minutes old when the hounds began speaking. They hardly stopped for the next two hours during which we saw three hares, or was it one? We weren't sure. It was the weekend of incessant rain when bad flooding affected large swathes of Dublin and it never stopped raining during our day. I was running quite a bit and was warm. Somebody asked me about the mysterious subject of scent. I said scent can be better on cool days, but this was a mild, wet one and we were still enjoying excellent scent.

We were on the one hill with its exposed limestone for 90 minutes going around in large circles. Some followers remained static, observing the action from the top of the hill. I kept moving, keeping the huntsman in sight and doing my best to not cut across the line of scent. In one field the beagles seemed to have lost their quarry. The pack broke apart, many of them sniffing the ground. This went on for a few minutes and then one of the beagle's tails went upright and started wagging - he had found the trail again. He was joined by a few others, a couple of them started speaking, and the pack was off once more.

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One of the installations created during the annual Festival of the Fires at Uisneach.

overlooking woodland, fields, lake, Mount Dalton, the beagles speaking amidst the tall grass of the marshy ground, groups of wading birds flying overhead, and a fine sunset. As we watched this beautiful scene attired in our old-fashioned clothing we were witnessing a mysterious, timeless spectacle, a commingling of the purity and peace of nature with the ancient tradition of hounds in pursuit. There was a sense of something greater than ourselves, something deeply alluring, a force which could endow us with happiness, with contentment, with bliss.

On the 13th of November the place where the Balgarretts were hunting was difficult to find so we met at a petrol station in Mullingar and Kieran showed us the way. The meet was at Wallace's farm, Ballard, which is just outside Mullingar and here we enjoyed a very generous spread, provided so kindly by the Wallaces, of hot port, sausages and sandwiches. When we began hunting it was not long before the hounds found a scent and we enjoyed very good scent for the next three and a half hours which took us down to the picturesque and atmospheric shores of Lough Owel. At one stage we ran past a motte & bailey which was only a stone's throw from the water's edge, and the scene infused me with an old-world feeling, a magic, evocative feeling down there by the lake and the motte - a pleasant, mystical, happy, peaceful sensation which logic cannot understand and yet which is vital to one's being a fully rounded and decent person. I was reminded of Pascal's beautiful sentence, 'the heart knows things which the mind cannot.' There were about 20 friendly people out today including master Simon Hughes (who ran a pack of beagles himself some years ago) and Whippers-in Richard Bonham and Liz Rossario.

Standing stock still only a few feet from the hare

At one stage excited cattle cantered towards the dogs bucking and leaping, but thankfully none of the dogs were harmed and the cattle calmed down without anything damaging happening. At another stage we stood stock still only a few feet from the hare sitting in tall grass; the hare did not choose to move until the lead hound was a mere two feet from it. We thought it would be caught but it managed to make its escape. At the end of the day we ate sandwiches and drank tea standing at the open boot of a car.

Sunday the 18th of December was one of those rare days in the Balgarrett Beagles because we drew a complete blank and the hounds never spoke once. The weather had been bitterly cold for the previous week with daytime temperatures scarcely rising above three or four degrees Celsius and the backroads were lethal. Perhaps the reason for the day's blank was the excessive

cold killed the scent. Another reason might have been the movement of hares into woodlands away from open fields when it becomes very cold. We tried for three hours and frequently the hounds' tails began to wag, when they became interested in something, but nothing ever came of this. However, it was a beautiful sunny day and we enjoyed lovely views across the relatively uninhabited Westmeath countryside, which looked bucolic and enticing. We were hunting on the Hill of Uisneach which is a fine spot.

The Hill of Uisneach is set amidst beautiful country with an ancient Irish link. Uisneach was the ancient seat of the Kings of Meath. As we hunted over it we came across a number of impressive installations put in place here during the Festival of the Fires held last May. One of these installations was a striking giant head of a woman, perhaps a goddess. The countryside surrounding the hill is undulating, and the uninhabited nature of the country to the west and north gave the impression that we were looking down on ancient, primeval forest, not too dissimilar to what the Kings of Meath or the Druids would have looked down upon.

For many centuries Uisneach was regarded as the sacred centre of the island. On the hill is a stone known as 'Aill na Mireann' or 'the Catstone' and according to tradition the five provinces of Ireland met there and Ireland was first divided into five kingdoms. (The hill was also said to have been the home of the goddess Eriu after whom Ireland is named and Eriu is buried under the Catstone. Myth tells us as well that the harvest god Lugh began the harvest celebration Lunasa from the hill. He was drowned in a lake on the hill and buried beneath a tumulus there. In ancient Ireland Uisneach was a ceremonial site second only to Emain Macha (Ulster) in importance and in the Oxford Dictionary of Celtic Mythology the hill is described as 'a hill that has played a significant role in the Irish imagination.' Festival of the Fires is an excellent festival which is held on Uisneach every May. The Festival organisers are currently looking for artists to take part in the next event and they want the hill to be full of artists in all genres, disciplines and media. If you would like to contact the organisers then email them at info@festivalofthefires.com.)

Silhouetted against the skyline as the day fades.

(Photo: John Fitzsimons)





Dutch wildfowl and hare hunting

In Tasmania, I had always read about hunting geese in my favourite hunting magazines, but I had never been able to take part in an actual hunt. After moving to the Netherlands a few years back with my Dutch wife, I had the chance to get up close and personal with the goose-hunting scene there. My first chance came last winter, when I was lucky enough to be invited to Zaandijk, near Amsterdam, for a goose shoot with my friend Frans. The day had been memorable to say the least. This year, I was more than excited when Frans extended another invitation as the last time I joined him, geese were flying over in huge numbers. On this hunt, our target species were speckled belly, and grey geese. There was also a chance to bag the odd whistling and mallard duck. Wild geese had featured strongly in the Dutch news because they were in plague proportions. Local town councils were debating how to cull the numbers and the flocks represented a danger to farm crops and aircraft flying in and out of Amsterdam's Schiphol airport. Not only do the birds eat loads of grass, they also leave droppings on the pasture so livestock won't touch it, rendering the land useless for production.

I was pleased as we stepped onto the paddock to see the ground was relatively dry. The subzero temperatures of last season had been replaced with a positively balmy 8 degrees Celsius. Overhead, the inky darkness revealed a blustery but mostly clear sky. While Frans went to talk to the farmer, Niels, another shooter called Fred and I went to our shooting positions. Niels was armed with his trusty Hungarian-made double gun, loaded with 2-3/4 cartridges and number four steel shot. I was also armed with my camera and a 70-200 mm lens.

As the sun rose over the dyke facing the Ijsselmeer, we were greeted to a magnificent view of silver-lined clouds and flocks of high-flying waterfowl. The geese roost on the water during the night to escape from predators, then fly onto the rich grass paddocks at sun-up. Grey geese and speckled geese, mallard, cormorants and whistling duck flew over in there hundreds. The ducks and geese were all too high for a shot and it stayed that way for about an hour. Even though sight of the v-shaped formations passing over was amazing, I was also looking forward to taking home a goose for the table, and hoped some would start coming in lower. A shift in the wind changed our fortunes. As I watched a group of low flying mallard ducks swoop in from the South just out of range and I was warned me to stay still.

On my left, geese were heading straight towards us, and they were low. We were totally exposed on that side, so I was surprised they had not seen us. As they passed

directly over, Niels rose and fired two quick shots. A large grey goose folded up and hit the ground behind us. From that moment, the birds kept coming. Our camouflage netting was erected to conceal us from an easterly direction but the geese were coming on to us from the South and the North. But, although we were relatively exposed, it didn't seem to matter. Away to our left I heard the double clap of Fred's Winchester and saw a mallard fall out of the sky. Niels barely had time to reload when a flight of five geese came towards us head on. They flew directly over at 30 metres and he fired. A bird peeled away from the flock and landed in the paddock behind us on the other side of an irrigation canal. The shot had not killed it outright and the bird was sitting and looked as if it was going to bolt. Niels left the hide and crossed the ditch to collect the bird. As he was walking back to the hide, I noticed a flight of three more geese heading our way and gave him a low whistle. The birds flew across in front and he squatted low to the ground, fired once, and a bird fell lifeless into a nearby canal.

Over the next half hour swarms of geese came over the paddocks adjoining the IJsselmeer. To emphasise the point about the birds being a hazard to air traffic, I watched a 747 Jumbo in the distance making its approach to the nearby Schiphol airport. A few kilometres in front of it, a single goose flew in the same direction. It represented no actual danger to the aircraft, but at that distance it looked like it was flying directly in

Richard carries one that did not get away.



Suddenly a hare breaks forward.

front of it. As the sun rose higher in the sky, Niels sent a text to Frans who had brought his gundog Labrador Ed along. We all watched Ed go through his paces picking up the shot birds.

The blustery wind had made it difficult for them to gain height

As we stood together enjoying the sunshine and chatting about the great morning, yet another group of unsuspecting geese headed our way. The blustery wind had made it difficult for them to gain height, so Niels was able to take his time with the shot and another goose fell from the sky landing on the paddock fifty metres away. Frans gave Ed the signal and the black lab bounded off to retrieve the bird. When all the geese were retrieved, we walked back to the cars and loaded up the spoils of the hunt. As Fred joined us, Niels handed out the breakfast. Goose drumsticks slowly cooked in goose fat and herbs. Wrapped in foil, they were still warm from the oven.

After the fine breakfast we headed north for the second part of our day's adventure which would feature the hares of the West Friesland vegetable crop fields. After a 40-minute drive we arrived and were joined by Richard a local ranger who would be helping to drive the hare over the long paddocks between the irrigation ditches. I had come better prepared for the mud this year, and wore more appropriate footwear. Luckily, the drier ground also made walking relatively easy this time around. As we waited for Niels and Fred to go out ahead of us and get into their shooting positions, I saw a group of around six hares moving around in the distance. A text from Fred and Niels said they were in position, so we moved off down the paddock, Richard to my right and Frans walking on my left.



No 4 steel shot and a goose folds up.

The fields consisted of paddocks roughly fifty metres or more in width and a few hundred metres long, each of the long narrow paddocks divided by irrigation canals. The shooters laying in ambush were positioned to fire away from us as we drove the animals forward. Hares usually lie down and hide hoping not to be spotted, then make a bolt for it at the last moment. Their behaviour is pretty predictable, so it's easy to shape a drive around them.

We began our drive and had hardly walked 30 metres when the first hare fled from its hiding place. Frans raised his arm to signal to Niels and Fred that it was on its way. Last year, the paddocks had been covered in a cauliflower crop, so the hares had had more cover then. This year the ground was mostly devoid of vegetation except for a thin covering of grass and hares were literally running around all over the place. And as if that wasn't enough, a small flock of mallard swooped in and naively landed on a canal not 40 metres in front of us. As the three of us drew up close to where the birds sat on the water, Frans made his presence known. A pair of duck lifted off within 25 metres of gun, there were two shots and the drake folded up and crashed to the ground.

Hares burst from their hiding places, running towards the guns

Ahead of us, Fred and Niels both opened up on hares running

towards them. There were so many, the ones running behind quickly did a rapid about-face and headed back towards us. One animal ran directly between Frans and I making for some great close up running camera shots. It bounded away to safety but another was not so lucky. It bolted to the left of Frans, which meant he had a clear shot to take the animal in full stride. Giving it plenty of lead, he fired and the hare somersaulted in a heap, down for the count. Over the next ten minutes more hares burst from their hiding places and ran towards the guns



Niels takes his time on the last goose of the morning.

with some making successful escape bids. Because of the dry conditions, the water levels in the canals were lower than normal, which allowed some to sprint through and over the canals to freedom. Seeing this was a surprise to say the least. When we reached Niels and Fred at the end of the paddock there was a good number of hares lying on the paddock in front of them, not bad for half an hour's shooting. We gathered up all the bag and talked about what had happened; I had a feeling the other guys were as surprised as I was, and had rarely encountered game in such concentrations before.

As we relaxed and swapped stories, a flock of whistling duck rose from a nearby paddock and flew straight over us. The flock must have numbered over a hundred birds, but no one raised their gun; in this area of Holland the whistling ducks were protected. It was soon time to move onto the next paddock and once the shooters at the end were in position, we moved off. In this drive, two



The game was divided between us afterwards.

more hare were spooked to the waiting guns and an unlucky mallard also succumbed to Fred's Winchester.

At the end, we did a quick tally and counted over a dozen hares and two ducks for the larder, all taken in just over an hour but now it was time to call it a day. We retired to a small cabin behind the farm, which had been established by Richard's father years ago. Frans offered everyone a celebratory cigar and a glass of the local Dutch gin Jenever. On the wall of the cosy cabin, were pictures representing memories of everyone who came here to hunt. One picture was of Frans' daughter Jitske, proudly holding her first hare. After the hospitality, we were invited outside and we divided the game between us. The freezers would be well stocked that evening and the happy memories of the day's hunt would stay with me for a long time, of that I was sure.

Ed retrieving a goose.



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