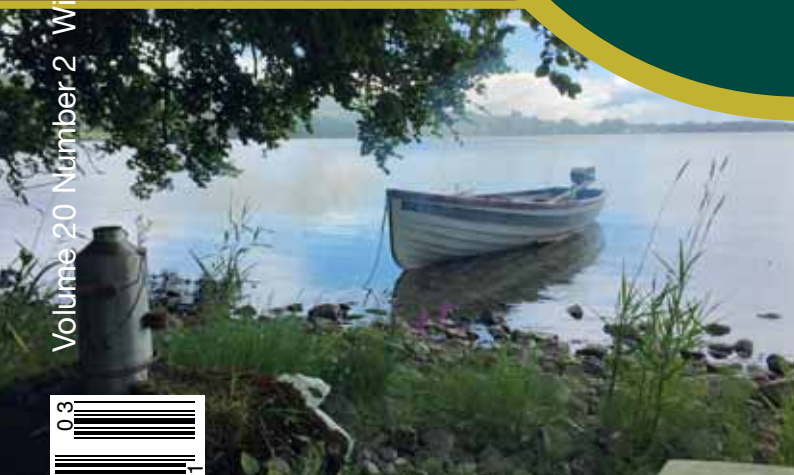


Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE

ON SALE TO
28th February 2022



IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS
A HERITAGE



Volume 20 Number 2 Winter 2021 £3.00 / €5.00



THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLICATION
ON COUNTRY SPORTS FOR A GENERATION

IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS – A HERITAGE



‘Irish Country Sports - A Heritage’ is the first major publication to chart and examine the traditions, history and development of country sports across the whole of Ireland. With country sports facing a variety of threats, this impressive volume is both a celebration of our sports and the contribution they make to Irish rural life and also a warning of what could be lost through ongoing threats to our sports. All of the major sports and organisations are covered: game shooting, angling, hunting, deer stalking and falconry, and, of course, working dogs with chapters on The Irish Kennel Club, springer and cocker spaniels, the retrieving breeds, pointers, setters and HPRs and even legendary Irish greyhounds, lurchers and terriers. Country crafts chapters include taxidermy and fish and game food heritage.

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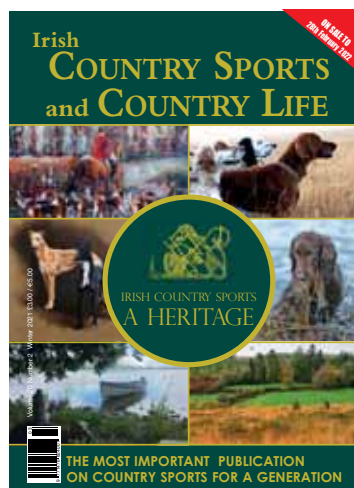
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Front Cover:

'Irish Country Sports – a Heritage', hailed as "the most important publication on traditional country sports for a generation"

'The Hunt' oil on canvas
by Louise Barrett

Mick the Miller and Master McGrath from a painting by John R Moore FT Ch Endawood Faith (CSB), winner of the Irish Kennel Club Championship for Cocker Spaniels 2019.
Photo by Jan Evans.

Blackstairs setters waiting their turn.
Photo by Dr. J. Murphy

Lough Arrow, Counties Sligo and Roscommon, Ireland.
Photo by Andrew McCall

'A fascination in the sky'.
Photo Jan Evans

'Irish County Sports – A Heritage' motif by Jon Ankers

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A superb new book entitled 'Irish Country Sports – A Heritage' is hot off the printing press and is already being snapped up by those lining up for an early edition.

'Irish Country Sports - A Heritage,' is the first major publication to chart and examine the traditions, history and development of country sports across the whole of Ireland.

It's a hugely readable book, lavishly presented and filled with a host of photos that capture the various country sports as well as a vast array of names and photos of people over the years. And you - who are reading this editorial and even this magazine - could be among them and as such be a documented part of Irish country sports history.

Launched with a fanfare in the Long Gallery Stormont, the event was attended by politicians, press and many country sports enthusiasts from the whole of Ireland.

So what's it all about? What's in it to interest the person who's a shooting, hunting, fishing, dog, etc etc, enthusiast?

Well for a start, it's packed with contributions from some of Ireland's most respected and committed country sports stalwarts, and the glossy volume provides a unique insight into their sporting passions and love of Ireland's flora and fauna.

The ambitious publication maps the development of country sports and explores how they have helped to shape and preserve both the rural landscape and its culture.

The book also provides an overview of how those sports are responding to the challenges of modern lifestyles, encroaching urbanisation and changing attitudes.

'Irish Country Sports – A Heritage' is the brainchild of Albert Titterton, who publishes this magazine and of course is the driving force behind the internationally acclaimed Great Game Fairs of Ireland.

Albert Titterton is, amongst other things, a qualified biologist, passionate environmentalist and lifelong champion of country sports and speaking at the launch he had this to say: "Country sports are too often the subject of contention and can be both misunderstood and maligned by today's largely urban society, but we hope that this

book may go some way to redressing the balance by demonstrating how care and concern for the environment invariably go hand-in-hand with country sports.

"Unchallenged and unchecked, misdirected negativity could adversely affect our rural way of life, causing this rich heritage to be profoundly diminished or even lost entirely to future generations."

I'm sure that those sentiments are shared by many readers, not least in view of the proposed legislation that's making its way through Stormont, the Hunting of Wild Mammals Bill, which has been introduced to the Assembly by John Blair, MLA, but I'll turn to that in a moment.

So back to the book, and I can safely say that there's no doubt that it will be regarded as the most important publication on traditional country sports for a generation.

'Irish Country Sports - A Heritage' takes an in-depth look at the major sports of hunting, shooting, and angling as well as devoting chapters to deer and deer stalking, falconry and taxidermy, game and fish food heritage and the promotion of Irish country sports, with potential benefits to tourism.

Not surprisingly, the Irish love of dogs is also extensively reflected with chapters on The Irish Kennel Club, springer and cocker spaniels, the retrieving breeds, pointers and setters and 'HPRs' and even legendary Irish greyhounds, lurchers and terriers.

It's understood that there are already 130,000+ active supporters of country sports in Ireland and, as interest in the natural environment and concern for conservation increase, current thinking suggests that figure will increase.

As Albert said: "We don't expect everyone to embrace every country sport, but we hope that even the most confirmed city-dweller may be persuaded to look with fresh eyes at the traditional sports and pursuits which have endured for so many generations, operating across all divides, and bringing people of all ages, classes and creeds together through a love of their sports and the countryside."

The book, chronicles a huge country-wide enthusiasm for county sports which enthusiasts believe will help secure the

survival of entire rural ecosystems and all within them.

'Irish Country Sports - A Heritage' is published by Country Lifestyle Exhibitions Ltd and printed by WG Baird, is now available directly from the publishers on 028 4483 9167, email irishcountrylifestyle@btinternet.com at £40/€50 including P&P.

As to the so-called 'Blair Bill,' when I was talking to those present at Stormont, unsurprisingly, I didn't hear one word in its support, rather I heard it described as ill thought through, confusing, impossible to police and an unmitigated disaster for the farming community, as was the case when early on the Ulster Farmers Union condemned it out of hand. What would it mean, for example to a sheep farmer in the Glens of Antrim, trying to protect stock on the mountainside? I heard example after example, including wise words from a couple of pest controllers who said that if the law was changed would they be expected to use poison along with all its negative aspects, rules and regulations? What was to become of horses and hounds? Hunt staff, would they be out of a job, not to mention the farriers, blacksmiths, clothing manufacturers, etc? What about the bloodstock horse trade, what would it mean for racing?

When the topic came to enforcement of the proposed changes, people raised their eyes, wondering what would happen if a hunt crossed from the ROI to NI and back again in border counties? Breaking the law, not breaking the law? What would it mean for the already hard pressed police forces - in both jurisdictions?

That's only the briefest of reports on the views held by the folk at the book launch and I managed to get a number of hard hitting interviews to be included on the next Virtual Game Fair Live streaming event planned for the 12th December 14.30 – 17.00. Full programme will be published on <https://www.thevirtualgamefair.com/live/> and if you missed the last Live Stream you can see it on www.youtube.com/channel/UCZwsE_EUmvu2xZvmwuq5CzA/featured

Paul Pringle



The Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival

WHERE TOWN & COUNTRY MEET

Shanes Castle, Antrim

Saturday 25th & Sunday 26th June 2022

The Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival celebrates its 42nd anniversary as an ALL IRELAND SHOWCASE for IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS, the Irish countryside and the rural way of life.

COUNTRY SPORTS enthusiasts can enjoy an action packed Game Fair programme of international country sports competitions and displays with lots of 'have a go' activities and fantastic prizes.

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The tM 35 is compatible with almost all SWAROVSKI OPTIK rifle scopes from the Z8i, Z6i, Z5(i), and Z3 series. As a thermal imaging clip-on device with 1x optical magnification, in combination with SWAROVSKI OPTIK rifle scopes it guarantees a 100% reliable point of impact. The tMA thermal monocular adapter is available as an optional accessory to ensure a perfect connection. The result is a reliable complete system that requires no sighting in.

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More information about the tM 35 and prices is available at www.swarovskioptik.com



Operation of the tM 35 is intuitive for the hunter keeping distracting movements to a minimum



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March stocking of Departmental waters

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has stocked the following waters with takeable fish in October 2021:

- 11 October - Castlewellan, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 12 October - Brantry, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 13 October - Bellanaleck, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 14 October - Castlewellan, Brown Trout, 1,000.
- 26 October - Castlewellan, Brown Trout, 1,000.

1. Details on recent fish stocking can be found on the [nidirect](http://nidirect.gov.uk/articles/2021-fish-stocking-figures) website at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/2021-fish-stocking-figures

2. Further information on all aspects of angling is available on the [nidirect](http://nidirect.gov.uk) website at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/angling



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It could only be...

Barbour

Countryside Alliance



Blair Bill Comes Forward

Self-proclaimed 'friend of country sports,' John Blair MLA has now introduced his Hunting of Wild Mammals Bill into the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has never been entirely clear what's his motivation, other than vague and un-evidenced claims of cruelty and it is difficult to escape the view that it is fundamentally about prejudice.

In our opinion, he appears to have clumsily cobbled together, over the past 5 months, a Bill that is riddled with illogical and dangerous proposals which, if implemented, would represent an attack on the rural way of life across Northern Ireland.

If we put hunting to one side, this Bill could potentially criminalise every single dog owner in Northern Ireland. Anyone whose dog chases a rabbit, hare, fox or even grey squirrel whilst they are walking, shooting, checking their livestock or engaged in any other activity would be committing a criminal offence.

Mr Blair had previously stated that: *"The proposed Bill does not go beyond the remit of hunting with dogs and makes no reference to other country sports such as shooting or angling and it is misleading to suggest that it does"*.

This comment appears to suggest that he does not understand the countryside or he does not understand his own Bill, because the wording says *"A reference in this Act to the hunting of a wild mammal with a dog includes any case where a wild mammal is pursued by one or more persons and one or more dogs are employed in that pursuit"*.

It goes on to say "the reference to participation in the hunting of a wild mammal with a dog includes a reference to participation in another activity (such as pursuit by dogs of an artificial or human scent) in the course of which a dog hunts a wild mammal". This could mean that if you are simply walking your dog in the park and it runs off after a squirrel, for example, you could be committing an offence. This in our opinion is a breathtakingly stupid piece of legislation which, if passed, is wide-open to mis-interpretation and we find it quite unbelievable that it has even been published.



Dogs in field pic. Could these pets be guilty of an offence?

Mr Blair has been contacted many times by country sports enthusiasts up and down the country and to most, like ourselves, he refuses to communicate. For those limited few that he does respond to, once they prove how flawed his perspective is, he simply appears to cut them off or claim to be misrepresented.

Whilst in the past Mr Blair has been given wide spread press coverage through various outlets, I note at the time of writing, these outlets have not even run a story on the Bill's introduction. Maybe even they can see how badly it has been put together.

CAI along with the Hunting Association of Northern Ireland and the Irish Master of Hounds held an evening at the Armagh City hotel to discuss Mr Blair's Bill coming forward. The meeting was well attended by not only those from hunting, but also the terrier, shooting and fishing communities. We wish to thank all those who made an effort to attend and especially to those who travelled from far and wide, we even had some who travelled from Cork to attend. Our Chief Executive Tim Boner along with Jim Barrington and Polly Portwin were in attendance from CA UK and we had a number of special guest speakers including Mr Jim Shannon MP.



The CAI/HANI/IMH meeting was attended by enthusiasts from a wide range of country sports

Now is the time to ACT we must all put our shoulder to the wheel to stop this attack. Everyone in your circle of family and friends should be encouraged to contact their local representatives and tell them not to support this Bill.

Wild Justice and General Licences

We learned Wild Justice have sent a pre-action protocol letter to NIEA in regard to the General Licences. Furthermore, they are threatening that if they do not get a satisfactory response to what they call 'flawed licences' they will lodge papers with the courts.

We all know there were serious errors in the General License consultation, which many people raised, leaving NIEA no option but to remove it. Having seen the debacle in England a few years ago, NIEA sensibly decided to keep the licences unchanged for 2021/22.

CAI and I'm sure other organisations are well aware once these errors have been corrected the consultation will come back, likely within the next year.

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- Video of the Ulster Golden Retriever Club unique double Championship and Open Show staged at Shanes Castle, Antrim
- Fieldsports Channel interview with John Blair on his controversial 'anti Hunting with dogs' Bill and responses by various country sports organisations.
- Discussions on the Bill and reactions from invited guests
- Preview of the 2022 Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival at Shanes Castle

COULD YOU BE OUR 350,000th visitor and win a major prize?

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If you missed the first LIVE STREAM event you can view it on
www.youtube.com/channel/UCZwsE_EUmvu2xZvmwuq5CzA/videos

The Irish Game Fair will return to Shanes Castle, Antrim on the 25-26 June 2022

Wild Justice now claim to have raised the £45,000 to help take the matter forward if needed. CAI will of course will be keeping a keen eye on this and we must ask the question might this be a way to raise money and then claim they forced NIEA to redo the public consultation something they were going to do anyway.

This raises some interesting questions - are Wild Justice prepared to go all the way? What will happen to the money they have raised if not used? Only time will tell.

Firearms

PSNI firearms delays seem to be the hot topic of discussion at the moment. It's not hard to see that the system has slowed, with renewals that would have taken 4-6 weeks now taking 10-12 weeks. CAI understands this is due to a number of reasons, one being when lockdown was lifted a surge of applications and variations were submitted and another being some staff being off due to ill health affecting processing applications, especially at a Senior Manager level.

CAI have been asking what the branch has been doing to elevate the problem. It would seem they are between a rock and a hard place, as to bring in additional staff would result in people



The licensing process has slowed and we ask what's being done

being taken off processing to train them up leading to further delays, or just continue on and try and clear the backlog.

CAI along with other organisations raised this matter in a recent meeting with the Department of Justice and we will continue to engage with FEB and hopefully see some improvement soon.



Game & Wildlife CONSERVATION TRUST

WHERE ARE THE WOODCOCK

Written by Dr Jennifer Brewin, Writer and Research Specialist

As we take another step firmly towards winter, falling temperatures herald the return of our migrant woodcock - over the next few weeks they will complete their inconceivably long journeys from breeding sites across Scandinavia, Finland, the Baltic states and Russia. The GWCT has satellite-tagged 65 woodcock over the past ten years, in addition to the hundreds studied with earlier forms of monitoring tags, and the results have sometimes been startling. The longest migration we have recorded was a journey of 4000 miles from Cornwall to Krasnoyarsk - these beautiful, secretive woodland birds are truly a marvel of stamina. We are privileged to have them here over the winter - feeding and sheltering in a climate which is comparatively mild compared to what is in store over the winter at their breeding grounds.

Equally as precious as these migrant birds are the other group of woodcock found here in both winter and summer - the resident birds which avoid the perils of such a lengthy migration by remaining here all year round. These residents are definitively in the minority, numbering around 180,000 in the autumn, compared with the 800,000 to 1.3 million migrants which arrive to swell winter numbers in the UK. Woodcock are on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK because both the number and the range of our breeding population - the residents - are falling. It is critically important to protect these resident birds from the effects of shooting too early in the season, when they are the only ones of their species present and premature shooting could have a disproportionately large effect on local breeders. Waiting until you know migrant birds have arrived in your area can dilute the effect of shooting on your residents.

Although migrant birds arrive at different times across the UK, because of seasonal variations from year to year, differences in local climate, the length of journey and the challenges that are

faced along the way, a good rule of thumb for most regions is that any woodcock shooting should not begin until 1st December. By this date, the majority of migrants will have arrived in the UK in most years. Numbers do continue to increase through December though, and new waves of continental migrants can arrive at any time through the winter in response to cold weather elsewhere.

Woodcock research is fundamental in providing us with answers as to how these birds are faring, and the GWCT continues to survey and ring woodcock in 2021 for the 11th consecutive year. Lamp surveys allows us to compare yearly changes in abundance at familiar sites, and ringing (or at least the subsequent recapture of ringed birds) provides a way of measuring annual survival in woodcock.

The fieldwork season is just beginning, with post-doc Chris Heward and Director of Research Andrew Hoodless undertaking the tagging to coincide with the new moon in November and December. It can be a challenge! The most successful catch nights are those when the weather is wild, meaning that the scientists venture out to catch woodcock after the birds have

settled down for the night when rain and wind are forecast, wrapped in warm clothes and armed with head torches. The worst nights are paradoxically the best ones in the world of woodcock fieldwork. We can only hope that the trends we have seen for woodcock in recent decades don't carry on to the point where we lose our breeding woodcock, so Chris and Andrew don't have to trudge around in the rain and the dark to no avail and we can enjoy this remarkable bird for many years to come

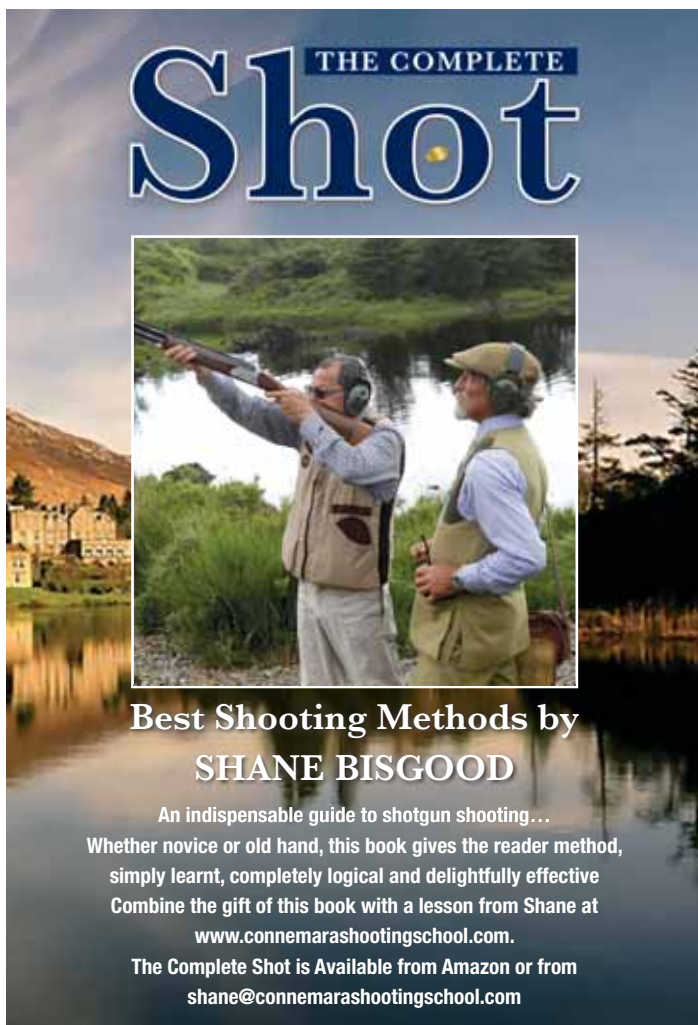


This photo was taken a good few years ago - but will trends in recent decades carry on to where we lose our breeding woodcock?



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Wild Bird General Licences for 2021/22 Published

Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has published the Wild Bird General Licences for 2021/22 on their website. There are no changes on previous years so members may continue to control crow, pigeon, and gull species as before.

Readers may recall that a consultation earlier this year included proposals to remove Rooks, Herring Gulls, Lesser black-backed gulls, and Great black-backed gulls from the general licence regime - meaning they would be protected at all times. However, Country Sports Ireland strongly opposed these proposals, and we are pleased that the status quo continues. We commend DAERA Minister Edwin Poots and his department for their pragmatism.

At the time of writing, we believe that the Wild Bird General Licences may be subject to judicial review and we will keep everyone up to date with any significant developments via the Country Sports Ireland website: www.countrysportsireland.org

No Pet Passport Checks Until Further Notice



The UK Government has issued a written statement confirming that there will be no routine checks on the non-commercial movement of pets from GB to NI until further notice.

This is to allow a further period for the ongoing UK/EU discussions, where pet travel is under consideration, to examine potential for

alternative arrangements.

Members will be aware that Country Sports Ireland has been working hard to overturn these ridiculous new rules on pet travel and we therefore welcome this statement and look forward to a common-sense permanent solution.

Full details on rules regarding pet travel are available using the link below:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/travelling-pets>



Country Sports Ireland Shop

Following many requests, Country Sports Ireland has developed a range of branded casual clothing that will enable members and supporters to show their support for country sports whilst feeling good and looking great.

A range of branded, limited edition, high quality and sustainably sourced T-shirts, sweatshirts and other items is now available in a range of sizes and colours via the Country Sports Ireland Shop. For full details see the 'Shop' link on the Country Sports Ireland website – link below:

<https://country-sports-ireland-retail.myshopify.com/.../all>



Many products are currently available with a special offer 20% discount and FREE delivery and would make ideal Christmas gifts for any country sports enthusiast.

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Landmark report reveals the impact of gamebird releasing

With millions of pheasants and partridges released into the countryside each year, what impact are they having? That's the question answered in a landmark report from leading conservation charity the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

Using over 140 scientific papers and reports as the basis for its findings, the report studies the ecological consequences of released birds and their management on a range of factors – from hedgerows and lichens to invertebrates and songbirds. The 52-page report is freely available to read at www.gwct.org.uk/releasingreport.

As the most common quarry in the UK, pheasants are synonymous with shooting and, for much of the public, that's where the interest ends. For others, however, the debate on releasing pheasants and partridges for shooting has gained exposure in the past few years.

The authors, Dr Rufus Sage and Dr Roger Draycott, highlight how studies show management for these popular gamebirds can help songbird numbers, supports the planting of hedgerows and can help butterflies and bees to thrive on woodland edges, but also highlight the potential for negative impacts such as



Game & Wildlife CONSERVATION TRUST

disease and damage to soil and invertebrates within release pens and how these can be reduced by following best practice guidelines.

Roger Draycott, Director of Advisory and Education at the GWCT, is hopeful that the report will prompt an open and balanced discussion on releasing and what those involved can do to make more of their efforts.

"Most positive effects, such as the provision of winter food and cover for songbirds, are a consequence of gamebird management activities", he notes, "while any negative effects such as an impact on ground flora are caused by the released birds themselves. Importantly, some of these negative effects have relatively straightforward management solutions."

The field-based research work referenced in the report was undertaken at many hundreds of different release-based shoots over several decades and provides a broad overview of what is

happening across the UK countryside.

Those looking to improve biodiversity on their shoot are urged to follow the GWCT's Principles of Sustainable Gamebird Management. These 12 principles were put together in September 2020 after consultation with hundreds of GWCT members, shoot managers and after careful review of internationally agreed guidelines on sustainable use and biodiversity. You can read them at gwct.org.uk/principles.

James Swyer, Press & Publications Manager at the GWCT, comments: "as providers of research and a leading voice in game management, the GWCT is central not only to this debate but also in understanding what is happening on the ground and improving standards. Participants in shooting should be discerning about where they buy their shooting, and all shoots are encouraged to follow our principles. The overall balance of effects in future will depend on how well best practice is adhered to."

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The N.A.R.G.C. Members' Compensation Fund

Members' Compensation Fund for Hunters, Clay Shooters, Target Shooters and others who are Members of our affiliated Clubs

The National Association of Regional Game Councils encourages game shooters and day/target shooters to support the Shooting Lobby by joining a Gun/Game Club, Clay Pigeon Club or Target Sports Club affiliated to the NARGC. With 24,000 Members, you will be joining the most authoritative voice for the sport of shooting in Ireland. You will also enjoy the benefits of your Compensation Fund, which pools the cash contributions of its members. Only Fund Members can benefit from the Compensation Fund. Protection is available for Fund Members up to a ceiling of €10m per incident. The Fund is administered by the Association in the best interests of the Association and its Associate Members.

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- Mallard/Pheasant Release subsidies for Clubs and RGC's - currently €4.37 per bird
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- Game Meat Handling Courses
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IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS – A HERITAGE book launched at Stormont 19th November



This historic book was launched in the Long Gallery at Stormont to an enthusiastic audience of politicians, media and country sports enthusiasts from all over Ireland. Because of Covid restrictions the audience was limited to 60 guests but as Albert Titterington said in his opening

remarks there were contributors, organisations and media from the length and breadth of Ireland – from Cork and Wexford through the Midlands, Dublin and the border counties to Donegal. The team from the Great Game Fairs of Ireland, plus Rosemary Hamilton from Future Image PR and Jim Masson (photography) and George Logan (filming) were kept busy documenting the event throughout the launch which culminated in a group photograph on the steps of Stormont.

Albert acted as MC for the event which was scheduled to run from 10.00 am to 11.30 am. It was managed so professionally that at precisely 11.30 guests were served refreshments.

Albert outlined where the book fitted into the Great Game Fairs of Ireland brand stating :

“This is the latest initiative by the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team to promote and defend country sports.

It joins the Irish Game Fairs - 68 Game Fairs over 41 years and, the Irish

Country Sports and Country Life magazine launched in 1985 and the Virtual Game Fair, which together have a fantastic international reach. The fairs attract an attendance of up to 30,000, the magazine in print and online up to 100,000 readers and the Virtual Game Fair has attracted over 350,000 visits from its launch in August 2020.

These promotional vehicles are not only good for country sports and the environment but also Irish tourism. In the past this has been recognised by us winning several tourism awards.”

He went on to state: “This ambitious publication maps the development of country sports and explores how they have helped to shape and preserve both the rural landscape and its culture. The book also provides an overview of how those sports are responding to the challenges of modern lifestyles, encroaching urbanisation and changing attitudes.”

And he added “I am delighted to say that most of the contributors to the book



Our Host Peter Weir, MLA welcoming guests.

are present with us today and it is no exaggeration to say they have come from all over Ireland.. You can see their names in the index to the book.

All of them have contributed to documenting the history and traditions of Irish country sports in a vibrant living history format.”

And he added “ I thank all of the contributors for their hard work and I must pay tribute to members of our own team and in particular Paul Pringle and Emma Cowan for co-editing. Emma also for working with Gary Leacock on delivering some very creative design. Irene for all of her work behind the scenes including being mainly responsible for the proof reading. And last but not least David Hinds and Don Hawthorne from WG Baird for delivering the project on time! “

Peter Weir, MLA and our host for the event was the first speaker and he very eloquently recognised the important role that country sports play in shaping and conserving the environment.

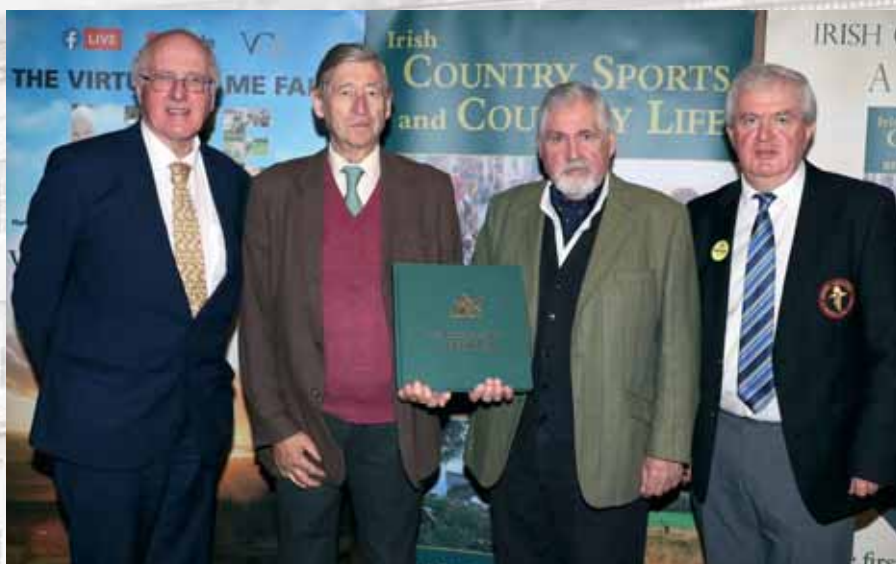
He was followed by **Councillor Jim Montgomery**, the ex Mayor of Antrim who spoke with passion about the attractions of Antrim and the important role the Game Fair plays in attracting visitors to the area. He issued a warm invitation to those present to bring their friends and families in 2022.

Responding Albert stated “Councillor Montgomery we thank you and I would ask you to pass on our thanks to your colleagues for their support. Of course we view this as a very canny investment by the Council as the Game Fair normally delivers circa £500,000 in economic benefit to the area and £250,000 of positive publicity , the Virtual Game Fair has attracted over 350,000 visits since its launch, the magazine and the book are both printed by WG Baird in Antrim and you have seen Antrim has a very large footprint within the book.”

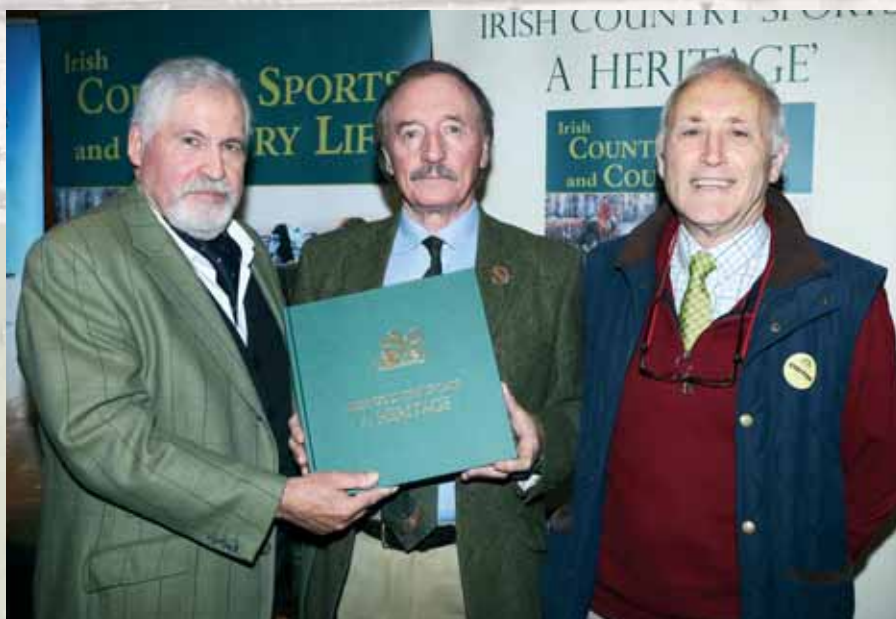
Albert then called on **Jim Shannon, MP** to say a few words. He described Jim and Bill Montgomery who jointly wrote the foreword to the book as ‘titans



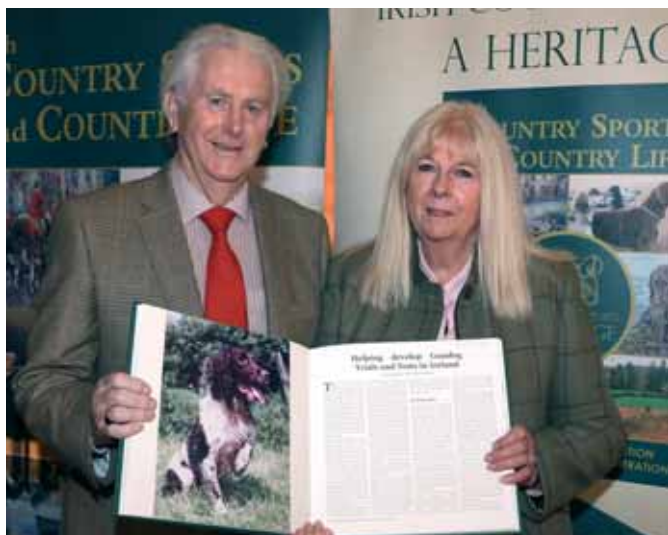
Councillor Jim Montgomery (ex Mayor of Antrim & Newtownabbey) with David Hinds and Don Hawthorne from printers WG Baird



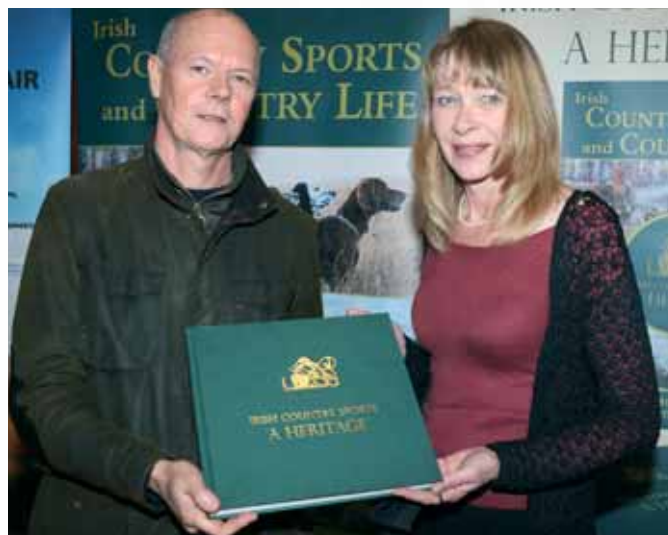
Albert Titterington with Jim Shannon, MP, Bill Montgomery and Dan Curley (NARGC)



Albert Titterington with Brian O'Hara and Larry Taaffe



Irene Titterington with Victor McDevitt



Emmett McCourt with Emma Cowan

of the country sports world' and expressed his personal thanks to Jim for the support he had given to the Game Fairs over the years.

Jim made an impassioned speech calling on politicians and public to recognise the important role that all country sports play in the preservation of the countryside and the rural way of life.

Albert then suggested 'we now move across the border to have a few words' from **Brian O'Hara**.

Brian served for several years on the board of the Irish Kennel Club and as Chairman of its Field Trial committee. In the latter role Brian was active in attending all of the gundog championships and many more trials. He himself has successfully trialled Labradors, springers & cockers and

even Glen of Imaal Terriers!

Unfortunately **Sean Delmar**, the President of the IKC who also made a very valuable contribution to the book was unable to attend. Brian made another passionate speech about the necessity of country sports people from all over the island standing together to defend and promote our sports.

The final Speaker was **Dan Curley**, Chairman of Ireland's largest country sports organisation – the NARGC. He too stressed the environmental work that shooters carried out on behalf of their sports saying 'shooting for most people is about 75% environmental work and 25% sport'.

Albert thanked Dan and the NARGC for the support the organisation has given to the GGF of Ireland and said he had to give a special mention to **Chris**

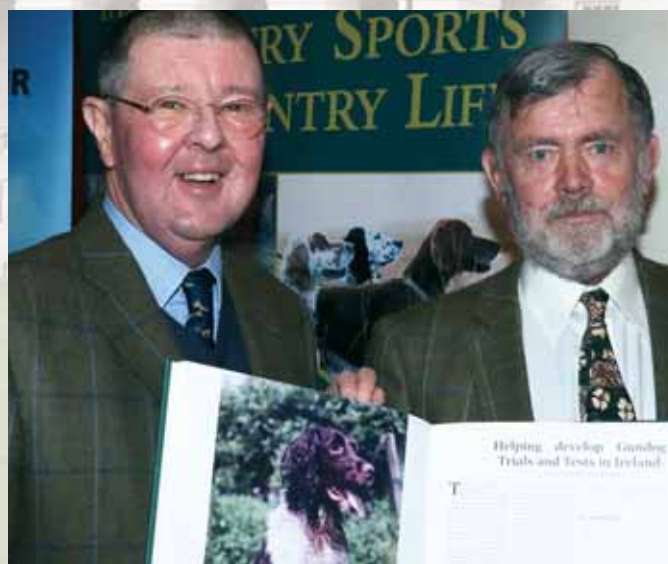
Gavican who produced a great history of the association in the book.

He finished by stating that he was confident that this book would play an important part in the future of our sports and inspire future generations to promote and defend them. And he asked guests to recommend it to their friends and family.

Referring to the 'Pringle discount' for magazine readers he said, "Paul, as editor of the magazine is always looking for ways to give HIS readers even better value and insisted on us doing a special Reader's Offer". I felt if we were doing this we had to open it up to all of our supporters – Game Fair and Social media etc So all will get the 'Pringle DISCOUNT' which really makes a book of its quality exceptional value at £40/€50 to include P&P.



Michael Martin and Arthur Greenwood



Peter Smith and Ken Lindsay



Albert Titterington, Dave McCullough and Mr & Mrs Frank Brophy



Albert Titterington, Shane Bisgood and Mary McGuigan



Albert with David and Mavis Brennan, Ardee Sports Ltd



Ingrid Houwers and John R Moore



Steven McGonigal, Owen Mulcahy, Albert and Kieran Young



Albert with Hugh Brady and Kieran Fox



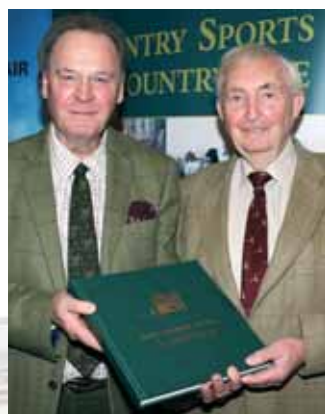
Albert with Bill Montgomery and Derek Fanning



Albert with Sam Willoughby, Jamie Clegg, Jenny Crozier and Gary McCartney



Steven McGonigal, Owen Mulcahy, Kieran Young, John & Margaret McStay and Jed Donagh



Wildfowlers David Riordan and Ken Perrott



Liz Brown, Bill Montgomery and Tom Fulton



Albert with Dan Curley and Chris Gavican (NARGC)



The Editorial team



Bill Montgomery, Owen Mulcahy and Kieran Young



The Great Game Fairs of Ireland team



THE ANCESTOR OF EVERY HUNTING DOG

I recently came across an 18th Century Irish poem which features a section about a wolf hunt. The poem is called “McDermott, or the Irish fortune hunter” and was written in 1719. The poem's images and vocabulary would be perfectly in keeping if the poet had been writing about a fox hunt. It's the same series of events as a fox hunt except the quarry, of course, is considerably more dangerous:

*“It happen'd on a day with horn and hounds,
A baron gallop'd through MacDermot's grounds,
Well hors'd, pursuing o'er the dusty plain
A wolf that sought the neighbouring woods to gain:
Mac hears th'alarm, and runs before the peer,
Outstrips the huntsman, dogs, and panting steeds,
And, struck by him, the falling savage bleeds.”*

It's estimated that there were on average about 500 to 1000 wolves in Ireland during the 16th and 17th Centuries. During the tumultuous years of the 1640s their numbers rose significantly. Cromwell said they were a

menace and he ordered that significant sums of money be paid to wolf hunters. The aim was to exterminate them completely from the landscape. For the next century or so they were hunted indiscriminately. It's said the last wolf was shot and killed in Leitrim or Mount Leinster in 1786 (there are a number of other contenders for the location). It's poignant to think of the last creature of its race meeting its end; alone, despised and misunderstood.

Prior to Cromwell's arrival, the Irish had a more tolerant attitude to wolves. Sure, they were hunted but not with the same grim, indiscriminate determination as would come later. The average person's attitude was more accepting. Flocks were protected as best as they could, and wolf attacks on humans were very rare. I remember trekking in Transylvania a few years ago. We trekked for three days in the mountains hoping to catch a sighting of wolves but with no luck. Our guide showed us wolf droppings. “They are near,” he said, and pointed to the steep, wooded slopes. “They are probably watching us now. They are more wary of us than we are of them.”

Wolves are beautiful and fascinating.

Their beauty has captivated me for years. Often when I look at my pet-dogs, or when I look at a pack of beagles chasing a hare, or a pack of foxhounds pursuing foxes or mink, I think to myself that these dogs are descended from the grey wolf. Every single one of them. At some stage in the far distant past grey wolves came in from the cold, lay down beside our fires and became a part of the human story.

Nowadays our landscape in Ireland is well-controlled, tamed and manicured. It's hard to imagine that it was once wilderness and vast forest inhabited by bear, wild cat, boar and wolf. Among the earliest sites of human habitation in Ireland is Mount Sandel in County Derry and a place near where I live - Lough Boora in County Offaly. In Boora a group of people, about 9,000 years ago, set up an encampment on the shores of a large lake. In some ways the landscape around them was a bit like paradise. There was abundant game to be hunted in the forests and there was abundant fish in the lake. As they lay on their beds in their shelters at night and listened to the world outside, one of the sounds which they most probably heard was the howling of wolves, a sound



There were about 500 to 1000 wolves in Ireland during the 16th and 17th Centuries

which has been described as one of the most terrifying and one of the most exhilarating sounds in nature.

These were the bones of wolves, probably pups reared by humans

This would have remained a reasonably common sound in Ireland up until the 1600s. Now if you want to hear it you will have to go to Dublin Zoo (where there's a pack of seven) and to Wild Ireland in Donegal, a wildlife sanctuary which opened a couple of years ago. It's possible that the hunter-gatherers at Lough Boora had wolves as pets and hunting companions. In the 1980s archaeologists working on the site discovered bones which could have either been a wolf or a domestic dog. "Given that wolves," says Kieran Hickey in his outstanding book 'Wolves in Ireland: a natural and cultural history', "were widespread in Ireland in

the Mesolithic era and domestic dogs were rare across Europe, it is more likely that these were the bones of wolves, probably pups reared by humans."

Ireland has only about fourteen native species of animal, and four of these (the brown bear, wild boar, wild cat and wolf) no longer remain. It's believed that the bear, boar and cat died out about a thousand years ago (you can still see bear marks in the Ailwee Caves in the Burren). The wolf remained on, in sufficient abundance for Ireland to be known as "Wolf Land". (The wolves in Britain were wiped out earlier than Ireland. The last wolves in England met their end in the early part of the fourteenth century).

Despite their being so badly misunderstood and so widely vilified, wolves are increasing in number in Western Europe and the USA. This is due to protection programmes

introduced by various governments. As a result, they are moving into areas which they have long been absent from.

As I say, all dogs are descended from the grey wolf (*Canis lupus*).

Our close relationship in Ireland with wolves is very ancient, perhaps as far back as 9,000 years ago (wolves might have been in Ireland since 30,000 years ago.) Experts believe that wolves were probably the first wild animals to be used by humans. It's even envisaged that wolves and humans hunted together, which might sound outlandish and impossible to us nowadays but not when you remind yourself that every gundog and hunting hound is descended from *Canis lupus*.

So, it's not beyond the bounds of possibility (in fact it's probably very possible) that our hunter-gatherer ancestors and wolves hunted together. They were both seeking the same prey, such as deer, and joining forces would



It's hard to imagine that Ireland was once wilderness and vast forest inhabited by bear, wild cat, boar and wolf

have been a mutually beneficial partnership. The sensitive noses of the wolves meant they could track the prey much more effectively.

The primitive weapons used by the humans, such as spears, could wound and kill an animal from a distance, thus

shortening the duration of the hunt and bringing it to a successful conclusion. Once the prey had been killed there could have been a sharing of the spoils amongst the humans and the wolves. The nearest we can get to this now is to watch Stone Age tribes in modern-day

Papua New Guinea engaging in hunts with dogs.

People and wolves sought out the same form of shelter

Humans and wolves coming together might also have started when hunters

brought home wolf-cubs. Wolves might also have entered human encampments begging for some scraps from people's meals. The interaction of people and wolves was facilitated by the fact that the social structure and behaviour patterns of a wolf pack and a group of hunter-gatherers were similar. People and wolves sought out the same form of shelter (small, dry caves). Wolves may also have been attracted to the shelter of human dwellings because of bad weather. This is a characteristic of the animal which still exists. The 3rd Century BC Greek poet Aratus comments on this fact in a fine poem (which also illustrates the belief that wolves were good observers and predictors of the weather):

*"When through the dismal night the lone wolf howls,
Or when at eve around the house he prowls,*

*And, grown familiar; seeks to make his bed,
Careless of man, in some outlying shed,
Then mark! - ere thrice Aurora shall rise,
A horrid storm will sweep the blackened skies."*

Ogham stones also reference this magnificent creature. There are about 300 ogham stones in existence, most of them in Ireland. On one of them is inscribed "Conal Cuan" which means "pack of wolves". Another inscription is "Cunagussos", meaning "wolf strength".

In mythology and folklore, Canis lupus is often portrayed as being a malevolent creature (including of course Little Red Riding Hood, which dates back to the 17th century at least) but sometimes the animal gets a good press. There are touching stories which illustrate a wolf's gratitude for an act of kindness by someone. Saints often bring

out the best in these creatures. For example St Molua took pity on a pack of hungry wolves. In return, out of gratitude, the pack protected his livestock. In many countries' folklore there are tales of people helping wolves in trouble. Columbanus was known as cú glas or grey wolf. Wolves would emerge from the woods and, in the manner of dogs, lick the feet of St Colman.

In Irish mythology we are told that the Fianna used to hunt wolves at night. During the reign of King Conn we are told a story very similar to Romulus and Remus (in fact wolves rearing infants is a common story, told in a number of different traditions). Cuchulain and Caoilte, the latter of the Fianna, loved to hear wolves howl and described it as music. William Butler Yeats was interested in the Fianna and, for a printing of his poem "Inisfree" he was



It's likely that our ancestors and wolves hunted together



Our landscape is very different now since wolf packs once roamed around

depicted dressed as an Irish warrior complete with wolfskin.

There is a werewolf tradition in Ireland but it's more benign than other countries. Several men in Ossory were cursed by a saint for wrongdoing and transformed into werewolves. However, the conditions of their punishment were that they attack only cattle and sheep. Unlike werewolves in other countries they did not attack humans.

The Brehon Laws reveal that our ancestors sometimes kept unusual pets including herons, deer, foxes, cranes and wolves. If a pet wolf committed an offence, including attacks on people and domestic animals, the owner was charged the same fine as if the offender had been a domestic dog. The Brehon Laws do not appear to regard the wolf as being a significant danger to humans. The contemporary thinking on this matter backs this up. Attacks on people are very rare. When they do happen they

are usually carried out by sick, old or rabid individuals.

A text from the 1670s provides an interesting insight into methods of hunting wolves. "There is no beast which runeth faster than the wolf," it states, "and holdeth wonderfully also. When he is hunted with hounds he flieth not far before them; and unless he be coursed with greyhounds or mastiffs he keepeth the covert like the bear and boar and especially the beaten ways within. Night is the usual time of his preying, though hunger will force him to prey by day. They are more subtle and crafty if more can be than the fox or any other beast. When they are hunted they will take all their advantages at other times they will run over hastily, but keep themselves in breath and force always. A wolf will stand up a whole day before a good kennel of hounds, unless that greyhounds or wolf dogs course him. If he stands at bay, have a care of being

bitten by him, for being then mad, the wound is desperate and hard to be cured."

Now when the wolves go out in the night to prey, they will follow the scent

The author goes on to outline how to attract the wolves out of the woods so they can be killed. He advises slaughtering a horse which is worth little, cutting off the legs and, "then let four men take a leg of the beast and at his horse tail draw it along the paths and ways in the woods, until they come back again to the place where the carcass of the said beast lieth, there let them lay down their trains. Now when the wolves go out in the night to prey, they will follow the scent of the train till they come to the carcass where it lieth. Then let those who love the sport, with their huntsmen come early and privately near the place and if they are discernible

as they are feeding, in the first place let them consider which way will be the fairest course for the greyhounds, and place them accordingly.”

The writer points out that sometimes beaters are needed to flush wolves out of coverts and then the greyhounds are loosed after them. Wolf hunts with hounds required high levels of skill and endurance. They could last three days. It was the hunting of the 17th and 18th Centuries, and not landscape change, which was the main reason for the decline and extinction of wolves.

My final word will go to the controversial topic of reintroducing wolves to Ireland. I think it would be wonderful to see these magnificent animals in our countryside once again, and, in spite of the difficulties, reintroduction could work. In his book Kieran Hickey says it's a bad idea. He points out that the landscape is very different now since wolf packs once roamed around. Only a very small percentage of deciduous woodland exists and the landscape is covered by farms and innumerable roads.

Kieran believes that there aren't any wilderness areas which are large enough. The largest national park is Glenveagh, Donegal but it isn't sufficiently large to sustain a wolf pack. “Over 20,000km² (over 7,800 square miles) would be needed,” he writes, “to maintain a viable population of fifty individuals in a US context. This area is more than half the size of Ireland, although it must be noted that in an Irish context the land requirements would be considerably less.”

He also notes that reintroduced wolves can thrive even in areas with high human population numbers. However, he remains opposed to reintroduction. “Public attitudes would have to change enormously in order for a successful reintroduction to take place, particularly among rural dwellers, farmers and forestry workers, who would most likely come into contact with wolves.” In Scotland millionaire businessman Paul Lister bought 23,000 acres in the Highlands which he has




Would wolves regulate deer numbers, mitigate the browsing of young trees and encourage regeneration as one rewilder suggests?

turned into a nature reserve. His ambition is to reintroduce wolves. Lister points out that wolves would regulate deer numbers on his reserve, mitigate the browsing of young trees and encourage regeneration. Introducing wolves, he says, would bring about biodiversity improvement and a more balanced ecosystem and a subsequent increase in tourism related revenues in local communities.

With the rising popularity of “rewilding” more people are coming on board with Lister's vision. At present there is nobody like Lister in Ireland, but with the passage of time who knows what might happen, and we might once again hear the howling of wolves in our wilderness areas.

All photos credited to Patrick Bolger and Dublin Zoo.

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A CONSERVATION 'RAIN CHECK'

The environment has become a pressing issue in recent years. Some believe this is part of the normal cyclical patterns of the earth's weather and a new geological chapter. On the other hand, under the epoch of the Age of Man, our existence is ultimately determining our destruction. Whatever the choice may be, climate change is happening.

Green is the logo of our time. What better symbol for products such as food consumption, textiles, construction, than a representation of renewable and re-growth. Everyone wants to be green. It is the easiest marketing sell for all demographics; the aged wish for legacy and the survival of their descendants, while the young want to survive and prosper.

Contrary to popular belief, hunters are also green. Social media of hunters decry the removal of hedgerows, highlight drainage of wet spots and anguish at the reclamation of bogs. Sporting clubs plant vegetation, fill grain hoppers, sow game crops that also benefits a host of other non-game

species. Ireland has 73 hunters per 1,000 people and this is significantly ahead of other EU nations with almost 1,000 game conservation clubs.

There were conflicting messages in 2020 when various Ministers spoke passionately about climate change, while at the same time planning permission was signed by the Minister for Culture and the Gaeltacht to commercially harvest peat on one of the last intact bogs in Kildare. It is not that we should not care or not be affected by the plight of polar bears on melting ice caps or orangutans in the rapidly deforested Rain Forests of Brazil, but much can be achieved on our own island that will make a difference to the climate, economic prosperity, brand and population of Ireland.

In these times of extreme categorisations, partly driven by the development of social media, people are defined as left or right, capitalist or socialist, conservatives or liberals. But the Irish psyche has always been one of moderation, and that has held us in good stead. As most people do not fit

neatly into a single categorisation, hunters are often the greatest conservationists. They probably need to be more public about their good works. The French philosopher Voltaire over 350 years ago warned about those who possess moral righteousness saying *"those who can make you believe absurdities; can make you commit atrocities."*

From those who are regularly out and about in the countryside, there is a great extinction happening over the past few years. Many well-intended initiatives have hastened this occurrence by unintended consequences. An example is the Blas scheme, which is an initiative to plant perennial wild flowers on set aside farm land. The consequence is that native plants or rushy fields are ploughed to plant these wildflower seeds. Within two years, when the scheme ends it is easily transformed into weed less, nitrogen fertilised pasture land. The relaunch of a REPS type scheme would be an immediately positive step to reimburse set aside land with no stipulations.

Agricultural land versus housing needs

With the demand for housing in Ireland, there are building sites all over the country. While planning requirements consider such factors as infrastructure and proximity to towns, there does not seem to be much consideration to the current productivity levels of farmland. In Kildare and Meath where some of the most productive land in the country exist, it seems counterintuitive to build vast housing estates on such fertile ground. With a growing Irish population, in years to come, there will be pressure to reclaim some of the last remaining



Before and after photos showing a small area of garden prepared for wildflowers

wildernesses to cater for food demands. Surely in 2021, a national agricultural land policy is as important as the housing one.

People's gardens now have an abundance of small birds, which initially seems a very positive development. The increase in the visitors to our garden represents the lack of habitat in most of our farmland and urbanisation. The regular visits of a variety of hawks and foxes to my own garden is testament to this.

During lockdown, looking to convert some of my garden to encourage butterflies, insects and of course small birds, I was astonished to find that to cover a small area in wildflowers cost €90. Surely, an action could be to make these type of seeds more affordable or a grant for garden conversion would be a positive step.

Unless current farming practices are changed, the only wildlife, whatever

that will be, will exist in your garden. That is not a criticism of farmers who are trying to make, like everyone else, the greatest yield and productivity from their assets. But there is an opportunity and appetite to review the millions recovered under carbon tax credits. Why could this not be distributed amongst our farming community to encourage green and sustainable farming.

The produce from Ireland under 'guaranteed Irish' would be branded as green, sustainable, and encourage premium prices. Irish farmers will never be able to compete in the same market space as cheaper, less regulated South American beef and with the pressures brought on by Brexit, surely the 'green avenue' could be investigated.

Weeds amongst the crops?

Many readers will remember walking through meadows full of buttercups and an array of other wildflowers, with cows

chewing the cud, and an explosion of a clutch of pipits shocking you in your tracks. Arable and pasture lands are deserts for wildlife and farmers should be compensated for any reduction in their yields by allowing weeds grow through their crops. I have rarely seen the perimeter of arable lands sown with wild seeds, though there is a grant for this. The implication is that the grant does not compensate for reduction in yields. If this grant system is not currently attractive, it needs to be changed immediately.

By redirecting the carbon tax credits to Irish farmers, everyone wins. Under economic terms this would improve the Irish economy in terms of the money multiplier effect, as for every euro the farmer receives the local shop gets a share, as does the butcher, as does the hardware owner who in turn spend their money with other local suppliers and employees.

Of course, green initiatives do not apply solely to landowners who are trying to earn a living sweating their assets. How many business parks, government buildings and national roads verges employ professional companies at great cost to cut the grass several times in a week. Are these vast tracts of land not suitable for sowing wild flowers to encourage insect life and support natural ecosystems? Having worked in many business parks, never have I seen the golf course-like grass used for leisure activities.

Irish bog value in conservation must not be depleted

The seemingly ever increasing volume of rain is leading to flooding across Ireland. Productive modern farming methods regularly shower slurry on pasture lands to encourage faster growth usually for silage, however, the earthworm, who does not appreciate the acidic content, is not doing his job. The perforation of holes by the earthworm allows natural drainage into the earth. When these holes are not present, after heavy rainfall water gathers and moves



In Denmark, the law requires owners of large areas of farmland to plant 5% of land for bees

as if on concrete. The role of the Irish bogs has never been so vital with their sponge-like properties. We have a complicated relationship with the Irish bog. For many, they are a symbol of poverty, repression and a symbol of hardship and emigration while for others are a cheerful reminder of the physical work involved bringing turf home. For some, they are a sanctuary. Their vastness, emptiness and the array of wildlife that does not exist anywhere else. The Irish bog is pretty rare in geological terms in Europe but unique in terms of the Irish psyche and culture. Bord na Mona have recently announced the cessation of commercial peat production. It would be retrograde to pack every remaining Irish bog with wind turbines and solar panels. It does seem peat production is being replaced with this energy plant that provides little to no local employment, but that is an article in itself.

The bogs are valuable and need to be protected for future generations appreciation. Large forestry plantations were sown on our mountains in the '70s and '80's. It continues apace in several counties such as Leitrim. These investments are lucrative to the

landowner in the form of tax reliefs, but have questionable environmental impact and value for money to the Irish taxpayer. Having for many years had the fortune to visit North Sweden where forestry is a major export, the difference is stark. The trees in Sweden are well spaced allowing them to grow large. Crucially these trees are native to their country. Well-spaced trees allow sunlight such that an ecosystem is sustained and an abundance of nature exists. The Swedes also can provide end-to-end production with many sawmills and over generations this expertise has improved, until that IKEA furniture ends up in your home.

Irish commercial forests are planted at high densities, therefore the trees often are not commercially valuable. As little light pervades the crop, no other plants can grow in the darkness and therefore no life is sustained. The runoff from the pines of the tree has a questionable impact on the mountain streams where salmon spawn. The good-sized trees are sent abroad for milling meaning the net return for the Irish taxpayer is probably negative.

An alternative is to immediately cease this practice as it has destroyed

thousands of acres of our native moorlands. "Coillte" the national forestry agency is to be commended in many of their owned Forest parks, particularly Donadea, which I am familiar, where they have harvested the commercial trees and replaced them with native Irish trees. The red squirrels, jays and even woodpeckers are now a common place sight. Nature is resilient if given a chance. With minor amendments, such as changing the type of trees planted to Irish trees few could quibble if longer-term crops of the deciduous beech, ash, and oak would produce higher yields commercially while also benefitting the climate.

It is accepted that in ecological terms, hunting and shooting's toll on game species is insignificant, and hunters are often a powerful force for good in the conservation of bird populations and restoration of natural countryside.

While some may be concerned with green issues in government, many of their proposals are not seen as practical or applicable in a rural setting. These measures as set out above are not costly, and I believe would see widespread support.



High density planting does not sustain life

Regulating a Double Rifle

Checking targets and analysing results

Is it science, is it magic, is it a formula or a dark art? Everyone seems to have an opinion about the best means of getting a rifle with one barrel attached to another to place two shots side-by-side within an inch or two of one another and at the desired range. Diggory Hadoke gets to grips with the gritty subject of double rifle regulation.

Not many companies still make double rifles, but for London gunmaker John Rigby & Co. their Rising Bite double rifle which was reintroduced in 2015, after a break in production of over 80 years is still in demand. The double rifle, once the mainstay of the deer stalker, the big game hunter and the driven boar enthusiast has largely been surpassed by bolt-action magazine rifles, which are cheaper to make, accurate, reliable and, above all, easier to make shoot tight groups and simple to adjust.

The old double rifles of the Victorian and Edwardian eras were painstakingly tested and adjusted in order to make them deliver accurately, with the

desired powder load and bullet weight. Looking into the cases of vintage double rifles, we will often see, on hand-written labels, pasted to the lid, detailed loading instructions, with specific notes on powder, bullets, wads and patches. If the sportsman followed the recipe, he could be confident that the rifle would shoot in the manner intended. The necessary bespoke loading tools were often included in the case.

I met up with one of Britain's foremost rifle regulators, Keith Dennison-Thomas, who carries out all of Rigby's double rifle regulations, while he was busy regulating a new Rigby .416 Rising Bite side-lock double on the John Rigby & Co. rifle range at West London Shooting School. Not to be confused with Keith Thomas, the gun engraver, Keith has over two decades of regulating double rifles under his belt. He explained to me some of the procedures and challenges for regulating Rigby double rifles accurately.

The tools of the trade

Regulation takes place at the range. There are indoor ranges, which are fully enclosed and there are also open-air ranges, like the John Rigby & Co. rifle range at West London Shooting School.

Arriving at the range, the regulator will have with him a collection of essential kit to be employed during the process. The most obvious being ammunition. This needs to be from a single batch to minimise variation. The average rifle requires 60 rounds of ammunition to regulate.

The regulating jig is a contraption that fits over the barrels and has hex head bolts in multiple positions for adjustment. A gas bottle is required to provide the heat, binding wire and aluminium wedges are for support. Measuring tools, pliers, rosin flux, tin wire, a lighter, cleaning brush and a tin to store the front sight when not in place complete the essentials.

If a proper bench and vice is available, that is ideal. If not, something like a Black & Decker 'Workmate' will



L-R Marc Newton, managing director of Rigby, Keith Dennison-Thomas Rigby rifle regulator and Jamie Holland, gunroom assistant

do the job. British weather being what it is, if working outdoors, a shelter of some kind is helpful.

The job is made easier if two people are involved. If one shoots and one spots it saves time. Also, the strain of repeatedly firing a heavy rifle is better spread between two over the course of the day. Recoil fatigue can affect the shooter and the results.

For a target, the initial four sighter shots are fired at a black dot. This initial shot sequence provides a datum point for the rest of the work. Thereafter, the A3 size half-moon target is used, with a one-inch grid pattern to make adjustments easier to calculate from up range. For example, a British .470 will approximate a thou' of adjustment at the muzzle with an inch of movement on the target at 65 yards.

Regulating new rifles

Once set up at the range, those first shots will determine the next move. Most new Rigbys will arrive with a consistent point of impact, usually within six to eight inches of each other. Keeping the sight in the centre, one barrel is moved at a time. To adjust the right barrel, the left is clamped and the barrels heated with the torch to melt the

tin. The barrels will expand five to seven thou' when hot. The wedge is moved and pressure applied to the right barrel in the jig. It moves, is allowed to cool, then test fired again. The process is repeated until the regulator is happy with the result.

Acceptable results equate to an inch and a half at 65 yards. Some people prefer a longer distance these days, especially boar hunters, who often want

the rifle regulated to one hundred yards, but this comes down to customer preference. The regulation distance is important. For example, a rifle regulated to touch bullets at 50 yards will be crossing at 70 yards; meaning the right barrel's bullet will impact to the left of the left barrel's bullet. Barrels regulated, as Keith prefers, to shoot within an inch and a half of each other at 65 yards, won't start to cross until they reach 100 yards.

A number of factors affect the results of each part of the regulating process. Light, thin rifle barrels on many foreign double rifles react more erratically to each adjustment than the, traditionally thick, barrels on British rifles, like Rigby. Small calibres are very sensitive and often the act of heating alone will cause the point of impact to change significantly. This is where the regulator must draw on his years of experience to feel each adjustment as he eases the barrels to the optimal positions for performance. In general, big, slow bullets are easier to regulate than small fast ones.

Regulating old rifles

Many a hunter has eyed the tempting array of fine double rifles in the auction racks and mused about taking one to



Keith demonstrating how to regulate a double



Some of the equipment required to regulate a double rifle

Africa. It is something of a lottery to get involved in this game. I was with a client at Holt's Auctioneer a few years ago and we picked up a lovely George Gibbs boxlock double rifle in .22 Savage Hi-power. Fortunately, the targets supplied with the rifle to show its performance were accurate and I later hunted wild turkey in Texas with it.

However, the same client had a .375 flanged by Cogswell & Harrison, which a US-based regulator failed to get to shoot acceptable groups before a trip to hunt dangerous game in Africa. That rifle eventually found its way to Westley Richards for regulating. It now shoots very well and I killed a huge crocodile with it in Tanzania a few years later.

Ammunition

Whatever its origins, when a rifle is made, it would have been carefully regulated with the desired ammunition, with a particular weight and grain of black powder or one of the emerging smokeless powders of the early 20th century, such as Cordite. To replicate the performance characteristics of these powders today requires some experimentation.

Kynamco have, for some years produced obsolete calibre ammunition for sportsmen but a lot of people load their own ammunition, with the help of

technically useful books, like *Shooting the British Double Rifle* by Graeme Wright, and careful experimentation at the range. This way, some of the once dormant rifles of the past, like the beautiful black powder express hammer rifles of the 1870s and 1880s in .450 and .500 calibre have been brought back into service. Also, some of the big double nitro express rifles for dangerous game, like the .450 N.E., which fell out of favour before the First World War are

now being carried in the bush and put to good use.

A key issue for double rifle performance is consistency of ammunition. Federal .470 cartridges have not changed since the 1990s and will perform exactly the same today as they did 30 years ago. Kynamco have periodically changed their brass supplier, primers and powder, totally changing the characteristics of each round. One newly regulated .375 was shooting inch and a half groups and when a new box of ammunition was introduced, the groups moved to six and a half inch groups, which is no use for hunting! It is best to buy a large quantity of same batch ammo when you set up the rifle: enough to last your lifetime of shooting (fortunately big doubles do not normally get fired hundreds of times a year).

Learning to be a regulator

Regulating rifles is not an easy job for the hobbyist to have a go at. The usual problem is that by heating the barrels, they lose all the solder that holds them solid and the rifle then "shoots all over the shop", according to Keith. In such cases, the barrels need to be fully stripped and ribs re-laid. The



Adjusting the barrels



Test firing a Rigby Rising Bite double during the regulation process

accumulated debris under the ribs needs properly cleaning out first.

Keith learned how to regulate by helping Paul Willis and David Perkins when they were doing the job for Rigby

and Paul Roberts, back in 1994. At first, Keith was there to shoot the rifles but the two masters soon involved him in the regulating and taught him the skills to undertake the whole job for himself.

Keith then spent a decade working for Purdey and a period in self-employment, building guns and rifles, as well as regulating rifles for several gunmakers, before taking a foreman's position at Westley Richards in 2007. Five years ago he returned to a freelance role and continues to work for a number of gun and rifle makers.

We are fortunate to still have a small number of really skilled and experienced professionals, like Keith Dennison-Thomas, who understand and can perform these essential services for the bespoke gun building trade. Without them, many of our old and new rifles would never perform to their potential and deliver the service that we hunters need. I just hope he passes his skills on to the next generation.

For more information about Rigby's Rising Bite double rifle, visit: www.johnrigbyandco.com.

For further information regarding Keith Dennison Thomas, visit: www.keithdennisonthomas.co.uk



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A Treasure Trove of Firsts

A solid thump on the riverbank was followed by a gasp of amazement from an eight year old child. The moment for that is what it was; remains embedded in my memory.

I cannot recall the journey to or from the river. Whilst I cannot remember the precise time of the year, I am certain that it was either September or early October. Neither can I recall the shotgun sound or swishing of wings but there is a vague memory which suggests the mallard duck was taken from a pair rather than a sizeable flock and that no other ducks flighted on the evening in question.

The bird was shot by my brother Paky on the banks of the River Suir. The farm we were on was owned by a man long since deceased. I am pleased to report that the stretch of river where the mallard was shot remains a prime spot for mallard and brown trout. When the surroundings ponds and splashes freeze teal flock to the inlets in abundance.

Ephemeral as this moment was it constitutes a key memory in my hunting life. This is because it constituted the first

occasion that I witnessed a quarry species being shot. This formative experience explains my lifelong craving for riverbanks.

Firsts of all sorts provide the game hunter with a treasure trove of memories. And the older we get the more we dip into this trove. Throw a blazing fire, a decent brandy and hunting friends into the mix and the scene is set for a myriad of relived experiences. In time the stories may even become repetitive. The boundaries between fact and fiction certainly become blurred.

I like to think that my treasure trove of firsts is particularly rich. Apart from personal firsts, I have been blessed to witness many more. I still remember my nephew Glen tumbling a bolting rabbit shortly after dawn with his side by side in a dew laden pasture field. An excited run and very hurried run towards the dead rabbit was followed by a beaming smile.

Perhaps, the sceptical reader protests that one should not become too sentimental about shooting a rabbit. I beg to differ. Whether a game hunter's first quarry species is a bolting rabbit shot with an ageing Baikal or a driven grouse shot from with a new Purdy, the fact remains that the moment belongs to him and to a lesser extent to those who bear witness.

I stood aghast as Sam our pointer froze solid in the middle of a shallow pond

Returning to my childhood days, I remember the first time that I saw a dog setting. I was mesmerised by the sight of a Pointer called Sally standing motionless as if in a trance with tail erect and right front paw raised as she gazed intensely towards a hedgerow. A cock pheasant was eventually flushed but I cannot recall if he was shot. In the intervening years, I have witnessed setters and pointers adopt this classic poise on rabbits, snipe and grouse. Over twenty five years ago, I stood aghast as Sam our pointer froze solid in the middle of a shallow pond. Praying that a

mallard was sitting tight, I raised my gun in eager and bemused anticipation. I could only smile when a moorhen flew awkwardly towards an adjacent drain.

I should add that Sam provided me with another incredibly special sporting memory: the first time I saw a cock grouse being set. Sam surprised the bird as he erupted no more than three yards in front of him. I still vividly recall the cock's hoarse cackle as he erupted from the heather. Incidentally, he lived to cackle another day!

Returning to firsts the years 2001 and 2002 filled the trove to almost overflowing point. On September 1st, 2001, I was privileged to witness one young man shoot their first grouse. Shooting grouse on our mountains is a genuine sporting achievement. The grouse reside well above the tree line ensuring that there is no easy access to the heather. It is a tough and gruelling walk and grouse have a habit of flushing when one is at one's lowest ebb. Most people do not possess the physical endurance required for the kind of walking involved never mind focus on hunting a truly elusive game bird.

Patrick Condon shot his first grouse on September 1st, 2001. The bird was shot on a high plateau. I recall Patrick thinking that he had missed the bird, a common experience for most of us on the hill. However, our dear and sadly deceased friend Dr Douglas Butler spotted the bird falling over a brow and seconds later a chuffed Patrick was holding the bird in his hand.

For those of us who love working retrieving breeds that first live retrieve on a shooting day can be most unnerving. After over eighteen months of patient training the decisive moment arrives. In my experience, whilst one tries to relax inevitably anxiety levels rise. Of course, your dog senses the mood and this can impact on his behaviour. I remember occasions when that first retrieve went as per the textbook.



Glen O'Halloran with a brace of November cock pheasants. Glen's first quarry species in the bag was a bolting rabbit.

On other occasions, the textbook scenario did not materialise. In the early nineties, Dad and I brought our Golden Labrador Heather on her first mallard hunt. Dad dropped a mallard which fell across a shallow stream into rushes. To my relief, it was a short retrieve of no more than twenty yards. Heather crossed the stream, hunted the reeds and retrieved the bird with a minimum of fuss. She did the same for the next ten years and became particularly adept at scenting running pheasants. Frequently, on the way to the river or pond, she veered towards cover and within minutes a noisy cock pheasant would be airborne.

My nephew Glen, whom I mentioned earlier on in this story, owned an excellent Springer named Buddy in his kennels. Glen puts incredible time and effort into training his dogs. More to the point, he is very consistent and highly innovative. The results speak for themselves. Buddy for example was an absolute pleasure to hunt with and gave one a deep sense of confidence when it comes to locating and retrieving game.

The more we willed the dog on, the more reluctant and confused he became

Buddy's first retrieve however, unlike Heather's, was at best tentative. Walking up our local river one evening, I shot one mallard from a pair that had held tight in



A well worn photo of Sally from the 1970s. Purchased in 1969. Sally lived until 1981. The first dog the writer ever saw pointing was Sally.

an inlet. The bird fell just fifteen yards out and the river was shallow and slow flowing. An ideal first retrieve or so we thought. Buddy was commanded to fetch and swam with enthusiasm towards the mallard. However, on reaching the bird he hesitated. He picked up and dropped the bird several times. Glen and I were on the bank willing on Buddy. But the more we willed him on the more reluctant and confused he became. What should have been the simplest of retrieves in near perfect conditions turned out to be a tense experience for men and dog. Buddy eventually arrived on the riverbank with bird barely held in his mouth. Crucially, Buddy was encouraged rather than chided by Glen.

Fast forward one year later to the same section of river. On this occasion, Glen shot a mallard which fell just short of the far bank a good seventy yards across. Unlike the previous year, the river was in full flood. The retrieve would have been challenging for a Labrador yet alone a Springer. Buddy had the strong current with him going out to fetch the bird. With a plump bird in his mouth, he had to struggle against a strong current on the way back. Swimming vigorously, a gallant but tired Buddy dropped the bird at Glen's feet minutes later.

We associate firsts with youth. There are notable exceptions. Even the keenest and most tenacious of woodcock hunter may have to wait decades before getting that valued left and right. Another possibility is that a hunter's sporting habits may change as he gets older. This is precisely what happened to my father.

The quarry focus in this house up to twenty five years ago revolved almost exclusively around two species namely pheasant and mallard. I am sure that both species made up around eighty percent of the annual bag. Teal and widgeon made up the bulk of the remainder. I should add that this was the typical pattern in my locality.

It was not that local hunters lived in a snipe woodcock or even snipe free zone. On the contrary, local hunters looking to expand their shooting experiences could have readily accessed snipe and

woodcock with ease. I suspect that the emphasis on pheasants and mallard is partially a throw back to a pot hunting mindset. For the pothunter it was size rather than sporting quality that mattered. My father for example never showed any interest in raising his gun to a snipe. A fat winter drake mallard was the prize that he sought.

Dad's shooting habits began to change in his late seventies. His grandson Paddy had become an enthusiastic deer stalker. Dad started accompanying Paddy on these stalks as a gunless observer. The bug bit and within a year he had purchased a 243 rifle. The transition was incredibly swift. The shotgun was rarely taken out anymore and he became firmly focused on shooting his first deer.

In September 2003 Dad to the entire family's relief arrived home with his first deer. I say relief because he was constantly being asked 'Did you shoot your first one yet, Patrick?' Paddy and Dad frequently combined early morning with late evening forays.

Dad was unlucky on several occasions. But tenacity is the friend of all hunters whether young or old.

He was seventy-eight when he shot his first deer. It goes to show though that that it is never too late in life to add to our treasure trove of firsts.



The writer's Dad Patrick O' Halloran currently is aged 95. This photograph was taken when Patrick was in his mid 70's. Pictured with his Erbi side by side 12 bore, Patrick shot his first deer with his 243 rifle at the age of 78. The Erbi was rarely taken out once deer stalking took precedence in his hunting life.

Private Ryan – 25 Years on

A quarter of a century ago Stephen Spielberg's WW2 film "Saving Private Ryan" made its appearance on the big screen. The story, based on one man's unfortunate situation also attempted to portray the horrors of Omaha Beach in Normandy on June 6 1944. All beach landing scenes were filmed in Ireland on Ballinesker Beach, Curracloe, Co Wexford - the film's remainder in the UK, with the Irish Premier being screened in a Wexford town cinema in 1998.

Twenty-five years later this movie remains a firm favourite with TV channels - hardly a month goes by without it being transmitted. The plot is based on an actual occurrence after D day. Private Fritz Niland of the US 101st Airborne Division had parachuted into Normandy close to the small Norman town of Ste. Mere Eglise where he was involved in heavy fighting. On June 7 he was dug in with his platoon outside Carentan when it was reported that his three brothers had been killed in action. One on Utah Beach on June 6th

another, Sergeant Robert Niland was killed later that day making his way to Ste. Mere Eglise, while a third brother, a bomber pilot, had been reported killed in the Pacific Theatre. Being the sole surviving Niland son Fritz was immediately withdrawn from combat areas.

A few lines, in one of the late Dr. Stephen Ambrose's books on the Normandy campaign that described how Chaplain Francis Sampson sought out Fritz Niland along the front line on June 7, were destined to become the theme for Spielberg's film. Records show that the Niland brother, shot down in 1944 actually survived and was still alive in June, but subsequently died in a prison camp.

The landing scene graphically portraying the horrors of Omaha Beach was filmed in County Wexford during 1996/97. Such a large influx of film crew and all this entailed provided an immense boost for the local economy plus an unexpected training opportunity for members of the Irish Reserve Defence Forces. The men, all volunteers, kitted out in full US 1944 regalia embarked daily from Wexford Harbour in pre-assembled WW2 landing craft, rounded nearby Raven Point on the way to anchor opposite the film set.

Sea-borne landings overseen by former US Marine Capt. Dale Dye involved several runs ashore prior to actual filming. Choppy waters along this stretch of coast resulted in not all the sea-sickness scenes portrayed being staged. Other sections kitted out in Wehrmacht uniforms were brought to their positions overlooking the beach by bus. All weapons for the film were supplied by acclaimed film armourer Simon Atherton.

There were endless hours of training for the sea landing

Lieut. Brian Kavanagh RDF who



Tom Hanks takes a break during filming



Sgt. Horvath (actor Tom Sizemore) on left carrying a .30cal M1 Carbine - somewhere in County Wexford

took part in the movie provided an interesting insight into procedures for the extras. Endless hours of training for the sea landing with Dale Dye assisted by former US soldiers. Given that in 1944 allied soldiers had been on-board ship from June 4th – June 6th extras had to remain unshaven for two days prior to filming.

Every morning all concerned entered a large marquee outside their college accommodation for kitting out, exiting as either American or German soldiers. Modern wrist watches were removed, taller soldiers were positioned in front when filming while blonde and fair-haired men were reserved for

Wehrmacht scenes. Endless uncomfortable hours were spent bobbing about in landing craft awaiting a suitable tide for perhaps just five minutes of filming, once again confirming the old military saying of “hurry up and wait”.

Approximately 2000 weapons were in use - 500 capable of firing blanks and 1500 rubber replicas. The blank firing versions were carefully deactivated ensuring live ammunition could never be fired. All uniforms and boots specially made in the US to 1944 specification had to be “aged”. At day’s end, back at base, the kitting out procedure took place in reverse with

each man’s clothing placed on a hanger bearing his name.

Due to my involvement with the D-Day Association of Ireland, the only member (honorary) not born on D-Day and conveniently living locally, I was invited to visit the beach film set in 1997. PR lady Sue D’Arcy arranged a guided tour and update on the entire operation. Despite being close to completion filming was currently in progress with Director Stephen Spielberg having some sequences re-shot. Kneeling in wet sand I watched Tom Hanks only 2 or 3 metres away emerging from behind a tetrahedron – “Rommel’s Asparagus” – close to the



Ian Brice producer, Steven Spielberg, Tom Hanks and Dale Dye on Curracloe Beach

shore following “artillery fire”. This sequence was followed by long bursts of Spandau machine-gun fire from a bunker overlooking the beach. All the while Stephen Spielberg was ensconced in a small tent-like structure on the beach equipped with countless cables and electronic gear, from which he oversaw all incoming footage.

Armourer Simon Atherton willingly provided a tour of his mobile armoury which contained an extraordinary collection of WW2 weapons. We had an interesting conversation about the various rifles used by US forces, specifically the standard 30-06 Springfield calibre M1 Garand infantry rifle and the much sought after M1 Carbine. While both used a .30cal round of ammunition there was quite a difference in their performance - the M1 Carbine .30cal bullet is basically a pistol round. See the accompanying photo. This carbine was designed to replace pistols and for use only by rear echelon troops, but as is frequently seen in movies, many made their way to the front lines.

A front-line soldier with a carbine facing German Karabiner 98K 7.92mm rifles would be at a severe disadvantage - but that’s a topic for another forum. Actor Tom Sizemore can be seen carrying one during filming in the

County Wexford countryside. An updated M1 carbine stood alone in the armoury’s gun-rack, converted to full automatic fire - in time for the Korean War. All the while, nearby in a large marquee military personnel were fully engaged in maintaining the film’s firearms in good working order.

Tom Hanks asks about Irish D-Day veterans

Tom Hanks took time out for a short conversation and asked many questions about Irish D-Day veterans and how they were faring after all these years, despite not too many still being around in 1997. I explained that the D-Day Association had been set up in the late 1980’s by veterans to provide support for each other and my involvement was solely to handle paperwork and press coverage for the organisation, although there was family involvement on June 6 1944. We raised money to send some veterans back to Normandy for the 50th anniversary in 1994.

Hanks had extensive knowledge of the events of that historic day, including being aware of the similarity between the local beach and Omaha beach. On being asked about the omission of some nearby Sherman tanks from filming, he smiled and said that other ideas were in the pipeline for them.

Obviously the mini-series “Band of Brothers” was in the planning stages but Tom Hanks wasn’t giving anything away! He was a great hit with the hundreds of RDF extras, making himself available for photographs whenever requested.

Our conversation was brought to a sudden conclusion by long bursts of machine-gunfire from the nearby bunker, signalling that it was back to work for all concerned. “Saving Private Ryan” has set the standard in special affects for subsequent war movies. Explosions were dramatically simulated using peat moss flung skywards by small electronically controlled charges buried beneath the sand. Endless time was spent on preparing the graphic casualty scenes to ensure realism, including the use of extras who had suffered limb amputations in real life. The resulting on-screen battle scenes portrayed horrific injuries that were quite shocking.

At the film’s premier in Wexford several members of the audience were visibly upset; a few actually left the cinema. Spielberg made no secret of the fact that he intended to get as close as possible to portraying the 1944 horrors on Omaha Beach. He certainly succeeded!

In April 2019 I made my annual visit to the Normandy beaches well ahead of the planned 75th anniversary ceremonies. In a Ste. Mere Eglise restaurant my wife and I listened in astonishment to a conversation ongoing at the table directly beside us. Arrangements for the forthcoming visit of then US President Donald Trump were under discussion. I won’t repeat what we heard - other than mentioning that one, a soldier, thought he was in Carentan until his colleagues corrected him. Strange old world, isn’t it?

Au revoir.





Oscar

Young Oscar

I thought Oscar had well and truly lost the plot. It Was 30th January this year, a Saturday morning with some snow on the ground and he was baying in the middle of some gorse bushes, not moving at all just baying – Being a true aficionado in the pursuit of foxes, Oscar never stayed in one place because the foxes never hung around long enough, he was always on the go, his familiar deep bay while running always made me smile.

I got Oscar as a young pup from Paul Sullivan in Cork in 2015. He had a calmness about him from eight weeks old, never shy, never cocky, just calm, sometimes I thought he was too calm. I often regretted never training him better as a puppy, but the truth is had he been trained he never would have turned out how he did. He wasn't a dog to be trained, as training would have only tempered his edge, it would have cooled

the fire in his belly that made him who he was.

As a puppy he never showed much interest in hunting. We walked the lanes and fields in the spring following his arrival in in autumn and while he scented and sniffed here and there, he never showed much interest. I laid blood trails, let him see deer carcasses, rabbits, pheasants and all sorts of things puppies become familiar with, but they never interested him. I didn't overly worry about it, but it did concern me just a little that he appeared to have a lack of interest in 'things.'

One evening about a year after he arrived, I was walking in the very same area where we began the story when he became very keen on a scent. He began sniffing and snorting, really getting his nose into the grass and took off running while whining and barking and was gone for over 30 minutes, and appeared

to be in pursuit of something, although I couldn't confirm this as I didn't see anything and I assumed he was messing about.

This happened another few times until one evening he was baying and howling in the gorse when I spotted a fox leaving the bottom of the gorse with Oscar coming behind a few seconds later. I realised then that he had begun to realise what his nose and his voice was for. As he matured from puppy to dog, he became ever more reliable and I really started to understand him and his voice and came to know what he was chasing.

He preferred to sneak about on a shoot and catch the odd easy pheasant

Oscar never cared about rabbits one bit. I could walk him through a field of ten thousand rabbits and he wouldn't

bat an eye lid save for maybe a yip or two if they crossed in front of him. I saw him on more than one occasion totally ignore rabbits that were squatting in the grass that he knew were there. Pheasants took his liking but he was never a beating dog. He preferred to sneak about on a shoot and catch the odd easy pheasant or grab a runner that was missed by a spaniel, but he never retrieved them like he would if he found a rook or jackdaw or a shot duck. He would start to eat pheasants if I didn't get them quick enough. He was a bit rough around the edges for taking to a proper pheasant shoot, but that's how he lived his life. Fox scent was for hunting, ducks and other birds were for retrieving but the pheasants were for eating!

As a treat I would give him a pheasant or duck that couldn't be cooked or used and he would take absolute delight in sitting at his kennel door and making a day's work from eating it in its entirety, feet & all and sleeping it off for half a day afterwards.

I always called him the Teckel with nine lives as he had more near misses, injuries and near-death collisions than anyone would ever want, and when he was around two years old he got badly attacked by two large dogs one day unknown to me and I found him outside the house, wet, cold and almost dead.

I took him to my vet who did what she could, put him on a drip and sent him home with me as she assumed he was going to die. I sat with him all night in my office and he never moved even when I changed the drip. I fell asleep at 8.00am and awoke an hour or so later to find him with one eye open and giving me a 'signal' wag of his tail to show he was still going strong. The vet couldn't believe he'd pulled through and while Oscar was very sore for a week or two, he was soon back to his old self.

He got injured again a few years later by an angry donkey in a field and broke some ribs as well as needing stitching. He came so close too many times to being knocked over by cars and being inches from being shot by a clumsy gun



Making a fine retrieve to hand

and 100 other things I could write about. Oscar lived his life very fast and on the edge, but he also died young.

His only real interest was foxes rather the pursuit of their scent. He would hunt them all day, but a carcass never interested him and he would walk on past it, nor would he ever tangle with a fox if he got close to it. He never let me down once and I remember one day taking him out with my old pal Nigel and some other friends and Oscar and his kennel mate Rubble flushed three foxes from a large wood on their own, and another from a small area of cover,

with Oscar marking one that went to ground by howling outside the earth.

So many times, he surprised me that I could write a series of articles on him. I could take him anywhere, even the biggest woods and stretches of gorse and let him go and within a few minutes there'd be baying to let me know he'd found a fox and would not stop until he had pushed him out and away!

Nose down and baying like a bloodhound

Back on 30th January this year, that familiar baying echoed across the gorse



He found this rook in cover

behind my house. He was standing still and I couldn't understand what was going on, and why was he not moving. I started to really wonder what was going when he started to move. He was coming towards me, running through some Japanese knotweed that had died and I could see him 50 yards to my left, nose down and baying like a bloodhound. I hadn't seen anything pass and I started to think he was barking at nothing. He reached the top end of the area and went out of sight, and suddenly again, began baying in one spot. I walked that way expecting him to move but he didn't, his barking was increasing in excitement and he was starting to howl. Eventually I reached him and looked over a bank to see him running in towards a trunk and skipping back, looking like a boxer, ducking and weaving from an opponent.

I got closer and saw that a fox had somehow got itself stuck between Oscar and a tree trunk in a hollow. The fox was not impressed and was going to give Oscar everything he deserved for chasing him, but he was not going to let

the fox get close enough. Eventually I got at an angle where I could get a quick and clean shot and the matter was ended. As he always did, Oscar had a sniff, came over to me and did a bit of whining and howling as if to say "There, that's that done!" and we walked home together.



This vixen weighed no more than 6 or 7lbs had no canine teeth and was in terribly poor condition

I inspected the carcass afterwards and it was an older vixen weighing no more than 6 or 7lbs and without any canine teeth at all and in terribly poor condition from not being able to eat easily and it was quite obvious that a humane dispatch was a kinder alternative than dying a slow agonising death from starvation in deep winter.

This was to be Oscar's last adventure, as over the following spring he became increasingly unwell and developed several problems with his throat which eventually led to a complication with his blood. We tried many things and it became obvious that nothing was going to work, so sadly I took the decision to let him go.

Oscar was a one off dog, a wild child, a dog with a carefree attitude that only ever had pursuit on his mind. He was different from any Teckel I ever owned and he made no apologies for it. He could not be let off the lead outside hunting, lest he would not return for two days. He was totally untrained, totally heedless but so reliable in what he saw as his tasks. He was in fact a small dog which was an example of going out, grabbing life and just enjoying it while he could. Oscar was a one off. He was born in 2015 and sadly passed away in 2021 living six amazing years.

Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Show Roundup

The DWTC Dog Show Sunday 30th May

After a year of complete lockdown and relentless promises on the road back to normality, and not a chance of a dog show on the horizon, finally in 2021 there was light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

With Covid 19 leaving a trail of sadness and destruction behind in our homes, it was a real treat to hear the dog shows were on the way back albeit a little short circuited. So it was fitting to come in on a high with the annual DWTC dog show Sunday 30th May 21.



Overall Show Champion and Best in Show: Aimee Agnew with Toby

County Down Hounds and Working Terrier Dog Show and Raceday, Saturday 26th June

In the shadow of the beautiful Mountains of Mourne lay the venue for the County Down Hounds and Working Terrier Dog Show Saturday 26th June 2021. The sun shone brilliantly, the craic was good and the showing and racing was top class.

For a first time show, the organisation was good with a big

turnout of Terriers, Lurchers, Whippets, and Strong Dogs. The rings were well spaced out and social distancing was adhered to at all times.



Overall Champion and Best in Show: Stewart Graham with Ace

Meath Foxhounds Dog Show Saturday 12th June

The quiet village of Kells, in Co Meath woke up bright and early on Saturday morning 12th June 21 to the sound of barking dogs, rattling trailers, all on their way to the Meath Foxhounds Dog Show. After losing our way a few times and negotiating our way back out again with the help of our excellent Sat Nav guide, Linzi Gardiner Magill, we finally reached the show venue around noon.

As this was the first show in the South of Ireland since the dreaded Covid came on the scene the atmosphere was amazing for all concerned.



*Overall Champion Lurcher Jed Donagh with Jess, handled by Jonathan Kirwan
Reserve Champion JP O Hagan with Clay*

West Wexford Harriers Annual Hound and Working Dog Show Sunday 27th June 2021

I woke up Sunday morning with the dawn chorus, bright eyed and bushy tailed. Yes, the day had finally arrived for the West Wexford Harriers Hound & Working Dog Show at Cassagh, New Ross, Co Wexford.

As our good friend Linzi Gardiner Magill and her famous doggy father Earl Gardiner had invited John and myself to travel with them, very soon we were on our way down the motorway to this beautiful part of the country. As we drove through Slaney Valley enroute to our destination I have never witnessed scenery so beautiful.



Overall Joint Show Champions and Best in Show David Dickinson with his winning Lurcher

We arrived at the venue at approximately 12.30 and were very lucky to get a parking place. The field was filled to capacity with dogs, trailers, families, burger stand, and stalls, and all glad to be out of the dark dreary days of winter to get back to the summer sport we all love.

Kiltrough Lurchers Working Dog Show, Jed and Tricia Donagh's Charity Dog Show in aid of Suicide Awareness at Dulee, Co Meath Sunday 1st August

The town of Duleek, is situated in the quiet valley of the Nanny River in the beautiful County Meath countryside. Nestling alongside the rippling waters of the historic River Boyne, this was the fantastic venue for last Sunday's outstanding Working Dog Charity Show in aid of suicide awareness.

The good Canine folk of Ireland, both north and south of the border made this a dream come true and came out in force last Sunday to support this very special cause. I have said it before and I will say it again, the generosity of our Country Sports fraternity knows no bounds when it comes to Charity events.



*Overall Champion and Best in Show and winner of the People's Champion Cup
JP O Hagan & daughter Jaycee with Ronnie*

HUNTING ROUNDUP



Huntsman Lloyd Parr with the Louth Foxhounds at their opening meet

HUNT NEWS

The County Down based Iveagh Foxhounds have appointed Limerick native Declan Mulcaire as their new huntsman.

From the village of Croagh, near the County Limerick kennels, the young Declan spent a lot of time following those hounds. During this time he fell in with that very famous huntsman Dick Chapman to whom, he says, he owes everything.

Declan also spent a lot of time hunting a foot pack before racing in point to points then working in a racing yard. He then entered hunt service whipping-in to James Lowry at the Westmeaths, for a season, then whipping-in to Peter Callan, again for a season, at the Kildares. His next move was to the Farney Harriers where he spent a season hunting these hounds prior to their amalgamation with the Oriel Harriers. He then hunted the joint pack for two seasons before moving to the Iveaghs.

Declan was quite literally born into horses and hunting and he is the

grandson of Jerry Mulcaire, a noted horseman, who was stud groom at the Co Limericks during the distinguished mastership of Lord Daresbury and he has the good wishes of everyone at the Iveaghs for a very successful time with them.

At the Ballymacad Foxhounds two long standing masters have retired. Thosh Kellet and Jim Stevenson have been in office, together, since 1993.

Gary O'Neill, in office since 2019,

has been joined in a new mastership by Michael Farrell, Brendan Cosgrove and Michael Bevan.

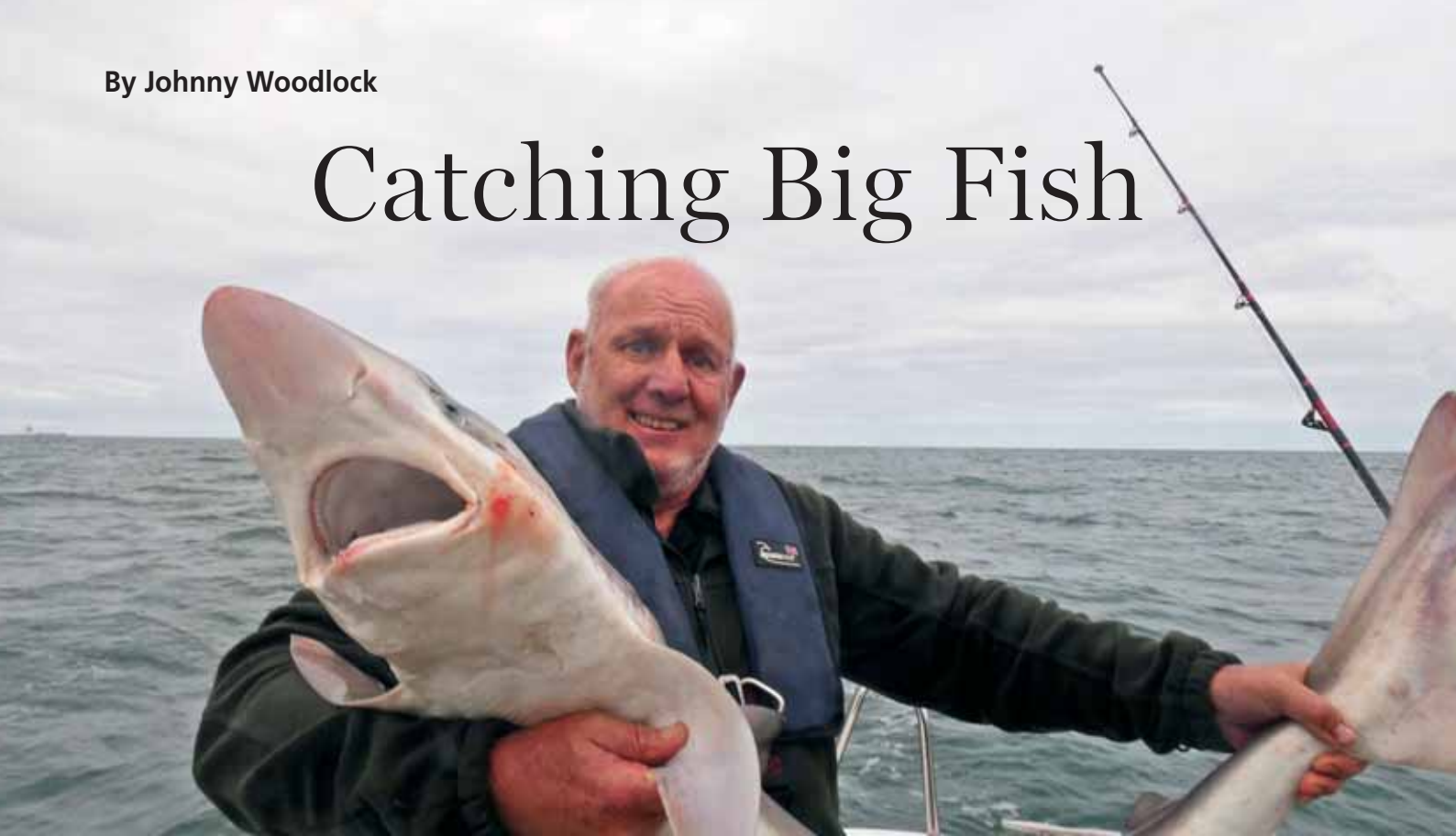
At the Co Galway (the Blazers) Foxhounds New Inn native Oisín Rigney has been appointed whipper-in to turn hounds to huntsman Anthony Costello.

The Newry Harriers have appointed Teddy Matthews, a long time supporter, as sole master in succession to the late Mrs Joan Close.



Declan Mulcaire, new huntsman at the Iveagh Foxhounds with his new charge

Catching Big Fish



The author with a nice tope off Dublin

Everyone wants to catch a big fish. I don't know if it's a 'manly' thing or what, but ever since I started fishing it's been the bigger the better. And of course the three biggest salmon in the British Isles were caught by women. Salmon remain the ultimate freshwater fish.

At sea things get complicated. As humans, we have almost fished the big fish to extinction to feed ourselves or produce other foodstuffs such as fishmeal. Big fish were and are the most valuable, and not just to commercial fishermen who get the best prices for the bigger fish of most species. Big fish are the most valuable to the whole ecosystem, as they produce the best quality and most numbers of eggs to continue the survival of the species. Scientists call these fish 'big fertile females'. Unfortunately there are not many of these left in many species. We have eaten them.

Speaking to older fishermen they describe catching 'buffalo cod' in the Irish Sea and one or two of them would fill a box. Now relatively small cod are the norm with a double figure fish a rarity. In fact, there has been a Cod Recovery Plan in the Irish Sea since the turn of the century, but they are still

scarce in the area, and buffalo cod almost non-existent. Fish stocks, when fished hard, tend to reproduce at a younger age so while there are lots of whiting in the Irish Sea they are all very small.

I remember when the herring fleet used to follow the vast shoals down the Irish coast each summer. When prices crashed the herring were fished for their roe alone, which was then exported. The bulk of Irish Sea stock collapsed, but there is still a small stock in the north Irish Sea and we know that fish stocks have a remarkable ability to recover if allowed. It may take some time, but they can recover.

To compound matters, commercial fishing has also targeted the food of fish such as sprat. Juvenile herring are also a valuable food source for predatory fish and most of what we eat is predatory, fish which eat other fish. The exploitation of so-called 'fodder fish' has a devastating effect on the whole marine ecosystem as they provide food for birds, seals and whales along with larger fish. In the USA when fodder fish (manheden) was fished out in certain areas, they discovered that the predatory fish such as Striped Bass and Bluefish turned to other more valuable fish

species to eat, salmon smolts included. The manheden is reduced for oil and fishmeal.

I find it amazing that fishing for fodder fish is still allowed, the nets used are small meshed to target small fish and they also catch small commercially valuable fish along with other bycatch as known fish nursery areas are where the sprat live. These fish are not for human consumption, but rather are reduced to fishmeal and then fed to pigs, chickens and in the past number of years increasingly to be turned into fish pellets to feed the fish farming industry. Of course before they are fed to farmed salmon, and they have medications and colours added so the salmon flesh is the right colour. If not added the meat is an ugly grey colour. And medication must be added because you cannot treat one hundred sick fish in a cage of fifty thousand. Despite this, the expected mortality in each cage is around 20%.

Excluding fishing from certain areas would lead to fishing pressure in other areas

To many people, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are the answer and indeed would serve as a sanctuary for vulnerable stocks and habitats such as



Two anglers releasing a porbeagle at the side of their boat

coral reefs. But the biggest problem with any protected area is how will it be monitored and enforced. Excluding fishing from certain areas would lead to displacement of parts of the fleet and increased pressure in other areas. Outlawing certain fishing methods is another option put forward, but you cannot just put hundreds of crews out of work. The number of boats fishing has decreased in recent years but those that survive are bigger and more powerful than ever.

Banning the landing of certain species faces the enforcement problem again but it has worked for some fish stocks. spur dog have reappeared in some of their old haunts since they were protected from commercial exploitation. Porbeagle sharks, once common before the longlines appeared, almost disappeared but keeping them was banned a few years ago and they seem to have made a strong comeback although French and Spanish boats still kill them on longlines but risk penalties

if they keep them onboard. However, a number have been caught by Irish naval vessels with sharks aboard. Anglers used to catch a few each year off the southwest of Ireland and off Donegal, but this year at least one charter boat has caught 23 over two day's fishing and lots are taking baits intended for blue sharks.

Anglers these days are well aware of their responsibilities and it is very rare for any shark to be killed, Most porbeagles are released at the side of the



The 2.24 metre blue shark was caught at night



Bycatch tope is worth nothing

boat as they can get very big and are toothy critters. As long as there are longliners out there putting down miles of baited hooks our sharks will be killed. I have even heard that blue sharks are scarcer than in the past.

Saying that, there was drone footage on social media of a pilot whale carcass at sea surrounded by blue sharks devouring it as it drifted on the surface. But that's what sharks do, they clean up dead things. I was lucky enough to work with Kevin Linnane for a short time, who ran the shark tagging programme for the Inland fisheries Trust some time ago. His work as a sea angling officer involved tagging sharks off the coast and the work showed how well sharks survive being caught and released when handled properly. One of his tags was returned from a blue shark recaptured off Venezuela, and a tope shark tagged in Ireland travelled to Tunisia.

Anglers are careful to look after any shark or skate they catch and many are part of the tagging study. In Scotland, one skate has been caught and released at least eighteen times and is still out there to be caught again. It was calculated that this one skate brings in about two thousand pounds to the local area by anglers each time it is caught.

No need to ban angling from Marine Protected Areas

If a trawler catches a shark or it is caught in a set net it cannot be landed, so is dumped overboard and usually some skate do survive after being caught and cut from nets. One was caught by an angler off Cork with its nose and tail cut off; it was still feeding

as it took a bait. Personally I do not see a need to ban angling from Marine Protected Areas. We have no idea of the numbers of protected and endangered animals that die as bycatch in commercial operations.

But don't think it has always been this way. When I started shark fishing with rod and line in the mid seventies there were lots of blue sharks around and it was not unusual to see dead sharks brought ashore as, back, then any fish had to be weighed on shore to claim a specimen or a record.

When I saw measuring mats in use in Australia I got in contact with the Irish Specimen fish Committee and urged them to consider using length based specimens. At the time they were considering this but there is no sign of it happening. Nagging paid off after a few years and now sharks and rays are not killed to be classified as specimens. In fact the majority of fish now have length based specimens. Potential new records still have to be weighed on land, but some boats now have the ability and knowledge to keep the fish alive while it is brought ashore weighed and released.

An angler I have fished with this year caught a thresher shark off the southwest coast and was roasted on social media for catching it and taking a few photos of it. Knowing this angler he possibly had to take it aboard to safely remove the hook before releasing it and despite it being a potential new record it swam off strongly. He did not target a thresher but it took a bait intended for blue shark, as happens with porbeagles.

I believe anglers are important to monitor recovery of certain fish stocks.



These spurdog will sell at €6 a box

Angel sharks are critically endangered and thought to be only found in certain places but anglers have caught them incidentally from places where they were not officially known to be.

Catching sharks of course has the whole 'Jaws' thing about it and careful handling is needed if you are to safely unhook a large shark, or indeed any shark. One angler had to be rescued by the emergency services from a charter boat miles offshore when his hand was cut by a shark's teeth, but he did not get a lot of sympathy from other anglers. It's not all about keeping away from the 'bitey' end.

Experience is a good thing when dealing with any shark. I learned to hold them correctly very quickly. Charter boat skippers see fish as an important resource to satisfy their customers and are not afraid to tell an angler that they cannot kill a fish even if they wish to. They look after their fish and many are former commercial fishermen. I know some who will bring a boat full of paying customers to a spot to catch mackerel and pollack and be happy, rather than bring them to a place where they could catch turbot.

The large fish have been eaten by us, so Marine Protected Areas, in some form or another are necessary. But the structure has to be introduced to monitor them also and I see many Environmental NGOs have called for No take zones, harder to enforce and angling could help monitor activity within these areas while not killing any fish. Many of these NGOs cannot understand that you can have a great day's fishing and not catch a thing.

New Corporate Plan focuses on sustainability, says Inland Fisheries Ireland



Iascach Iníre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

“If I was to sum up our corporate plan in one word, it would be this – sustainability,” Francis O’Donnell, Chief Executive Officer with Inland Fisheries Ireland.



Francis O’Donnell, Chief Executive Officer of Inland Fisheries Ireland. Photography Credit: Emagine

Inland Fisheries Ireland, the state agency responsible for the protection

and conservation of freshwater fish and habitats, has launched its 2021 – 2025 corporate plan.

Following on from the Government’s Climate Action Bill, Inland Fisheries Ireland will focus on the conservation and preservation of inland fisheries and sea angling resources.

The plan is underpinned by seven ‘High Level Objectives’ and these are centred around: Habitats, Fish, Stakeholders, Sustainability, Our People, Corporate Management and Innovation.

In summarising the new plan, Francis O’Donnell said: “If I was to sum up our corporate plan in one word, it would be this – sustainability. It’s at the heart of what we’re trying to achieve at Inland Fisheries Ireland, from developing sustainable fish habitats to promoting sustainable angling to achieving our

climate action and biodiversity goals in the most sustainable way possible.”

Fintan Gorman, the Chairperson of Inland Fisheries Ireland, said:

“This plan comes at a vital time for



Fintan Gorman, Chairperson of Inland Fisheries Ireland. Photography Credit: Emagine

Inland Fisheries Ireland and at a critical time for the resource. The clear message here is that



Pictured is the Glenamurra River in Co. Mayo, following the completion of fencing and planting along the river under the ‘Habitats and Conservation’ scheme. Photography credit: Inland Fisheries Ireland

Inland Fisheries Ireland will concentrate on its core functions. Our native fish species are under ever-increasing threat from an array of sources, such as poor water quality, urbanisation, intensive farming practices, climate change and illegal fishing. Therefore, fish populations and their habitats are under pressure as never before and the clock is ticking.”

Inland Fisheries Ireland – Corporate Plan 2021 - 2025

Vision

To place the inland fisheries resource in the best sustainable position possible for the benefit of future generations.

Mission

To protect, manage and conserve Ireland’s inland fisheries and sea angling resources and to maximise their sustainability and natural biodiversity.

Values

As a state agency:

- We work collaboratively with professionalism
- We are open, transparent and accountable
- We act with respect and integrity
- We are committed to stewardship and sustainability

High Level Objectives

HABITATS - To sustainably

develop and improve fish habitats

FISH - To protect, maintain and enhance Ireland's wild fish populations

STAKEHOLDERS - To actively engage with stakeholders in the continued stewardship of our shared resource

SUSTAINABILITY - To play a leadership role in achieving our climate action and biodiversity goals

OUR PEOPLE - To value our people and support their development and performance

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT
- To foster a culture of value for money and evaluation of performance in a measurable, transparent and accountable manner



Pictured are paired deflectors, which are part of the River Deel enhancement project near Raharney, Co. Westmeath, supported under the 'Habitats and Conservation' scheme.

Photography credit: Inland Fisheries Ireland.

INNOVATION - Harness the power of innovation to continue to deliver a modern fisheries service

Mr O'Donnell added: "The 2021 to 2025 Corporate Plan will help Inland Fisheries Ireland to ground our priorities for the next five years

to deliver on our statutory remit through seven new high-level objectives. Our vision, mission and values will guide our work. And to succeed, we'll need the collaboration and assistance of all those who care for, and are charged with,

responsibility for our inland fisheries and sea angling resource."

Further information

The full 2021 – 2025 Corporate Plan can be downloaded from the Inland Fisheries Ireland website at www.fisheriesireland.ie/publications



A Wild Atlantic Salmon being released in Co. Galway

High Level Objectives from our Corporate Plan 2021-2025



Iascach Intíre Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland



01 HABITATS

SUSTAINABLY DEVELOP
AND IMPROVE FISH HABITATS



02 FISH

TO PROTECT, MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE
IRELAND'S WILD FISH POPULATIONS



03 STAKEHOLDERS

TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS
IN THE CONTINUED STEWARDSHIP OF OUR
SHARED RESOURCE



04 SUSTAINABILITY

TO PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN ACHIEVING
OUR CLIMATE ACTION AND BIODIVERSITY GOALS



05 OUR PEOPLE

TO VALUE OUR PEOPLE AND SUPPORT THEIR
DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE



06 CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

TO FOSTER A CULTURE OF VALUE FOR MONEY AND
EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE IN A MEASURABLE,
TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE MANNER



07 INNOVATION

HARNESS THE POWER OF INNOVATION TO CONTINUE TO
DELIVER A MODERN FISHERIES SERVICE

Find out more about our Corporate Plan and our work at www.fisheriesireland.ie

www.glendapowellguiding.com
Guided Fishing & Tuition



www.blackwatersalmonfishery.com
Prime Salmon Fishing on the famous Munster Blackwater River in Ireland

The Smartwave AV3500



The Smartwave AV3500 has impressive deck space lending it to many applications. This craft is well suited as a tender, fishing or duck shooting platform, for rescue work or as a tough

commercial boat. In short the AV3500 will excel in every application. The AV3500 is designed for maximum space, stability and low planning speed.

Specifications

Length 3.5m (11.5ft)
External beam 1.7m (5.6ft)
Hull Weight 100kg (220lbs)

Horsepower 25Hp
Deadrise 13deg
Hull thickness 8mm
Warranty 5 years
Max No People 4
Max Payload 340 Kg

Standard Accessories

Stern grab rails
Anchor cleat & locker
Bow storage area with padded seat
Rear seats
Central bench seat
Bow seat
Fuel storage
2 x fishing rod holders
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**5 Year
Warranty**

Traditional trouting



A little grayling splashes on the surface

I'd like to take you back in time to the very roots of fly fishing, using the traditional method on an historic water. There is much debate about the roots of fly fishing with many people quoting Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton as the founding fathers. Whilst they may have gained popular publicity the roots of traditional fly fishing can be traced back a further 500 years or more to the Cistercian monks and the alpine streams of Italy in the 11th century, some evidence supports use of the system by the Romans even. The texts tell of simple, slim-bodied, soft hackled flies and short lines to drift them in the faster water, exactly how the north country spiders are tied and fished.

So how did the continental fishing methods reach the remote Dales of Yorkshire? To answer this one must consider the times, it was a period when Christian pilgrimages were popular and the mighty Abbeys were vastly influential to both trade and travel. It

isn't difficult when you realise the importance they had in developing Yorkshire's wool trade, exporting bales of prime Swaledale wool to the continent and knowledge of the flies being brought the opposite way and

then working through the Dales by word of mouth amongst the drovers and from Abbey to Abbey.

The popular flies that have stood the test of time and perpetuate the tradition have been distilled over the years from a



Light tackle and tiny flies



They are really beautiful little fish so back they go

much wider catalogue of patterns. Just as fly tyers today produce a multitude of very similar offerings, so did the tyers of old, each trying to put their own twist on patterns using slightly different colours and feather selection. The same theme runs through them all though, they are small, sparsely dressed and rely on the movement of the hackle to trigger the fish into action.

Soft, long hackles pulsate tantalisingly

The old stalwarts of snipe and purple, partridge and orange, waterhen bloa, black magic, dark watchet and Yorkshire greenwell will still catch fish on any moving water when fished as they are meant to be. It is a very simple and easy method to employ that covers



An olive spider and a snipe and purple process to be great combination on the day

all the water systematically, the secret is simply to allow the flies to drift with the moving water naturally. The soft, long hackles pulsate tantalisingly as the fly tumbles through on the current, mimicking the legs of a struggling insect. The result is fast, ferocious takes as the fish has little time to make a decision and then act upon it before the morsel is whisked away in the riffle. It is a fun method to use and is enjoyable in its simplicity.

I make no excuse about being thrifty with my tackle, I make do with what I have got rather than have a multitude of different rods for different approaches, so I employed my 8-foot 4 weight as it is the lightest outfit I have. The average stamp of the wild fish in the upper Dove is small, a 12 inch fish is a big one so a 3lb tippet is plenty and is strong enough

to survive the odd foray into a tree, thereby saving flies. The river isn't wide, maybe two rod lengths possibly three at the most and wading on this stretch is prohibited, I wore my wellies for standing in the edge was as bold as I got. With a small pack on my back containing a small box of flies, spare tippet, clipper and forceps plus something to eat and drink I set off down the hallowed banks that had been trod by the likes of Walton, Cotton and Kite.

The river was fairly low and it was a warm, spring afternoon so I expected the fish to be holding in or around the flows into the pools, the riffles between were almost dry in most cases, or only a couple of inches deep in others. I set up with a snipe and purple on the point and a Yorkshire Greenwell on a dropper 18"

above, for this small river two flies are all you need. Now, I am no seasoned expert but this method of nymphing is akin to dry fly fishing, but below the surface. The flies swirl around just a little deeper than an emerger rides, but not as deep as a modern nymph, those flowing hackles acting like a parachute in the current, keeping the flies higher in the water and wavering like fingers across a piano as the turbulence pulls at them, calling the trout to take.

There was a busy hatch of flies of various types going on, small olives and the odd sedge, I even saw a big stonefly running across the rocks, life on the river had begun. I started by having just a couple of feet of fly line out of the tip ring and an 8-foot leader, this allowed me to fish all the near water and control the flies as they sped downstream,



A typical wild brownie to admire and carefully release



Another brownie comes to a carefully wetted hand

fishing these spider patterns is all about line control, unlike a dry fly where you have time to pick up a bit of loose leader when you see the take, when the fish hit a spider in the flowing stream the first you know about it is when the fish is hooked, or you miss it but feel the last vestiges of the take. I soon learned to keep my rod tip higher than normal and draw the line through the rings with my left hand to maintain the pace of the water.

I followed the flies down with my rod tip at the same time recovering line

I think it was about my third pool when I saw a splashy rise towards the end of the flow, I had got into a sort of rhythm with the water by this time, with the first pools acting as practice. I prepared my cast and gently swung the flies up and across the current and immediately threw in a small, cross stream mend, then followed the flies

down with my rod tip at the same time recovering line with my left hand as the current brought the flies closer, there was a sudden tug and my rod slammed round as the trout grabbed the fly and dived back to it's holding spot, already hooked. The ferocity and strength of that little trout reminded me why I love fishing for these small, but beautiful little trout of the Derbyshire Peaks. They are as fit as Olympic athletes and the colour of freshly opened buttercups. Occasionally a tiny grayling parr would jump on the hook if I let the flies reach the calmer water at the end of the swing, these are the future stocks and show the health of the river.

I continued to catch fish in virtually every run I fished at a nice gentle pace down the stretch. It might be one, possibly two fish depending on the size of the swim, then move kind of approach. By the time I had caught half a dozen I sat down and contemplated my surroundings with a beer. Thinking

back, every fish had taken the Greenwells, not a single take on the snipe and purple, so I decided it was time for a change. I had a look in my meagre box and tried a partridge and orange in it's place, the Greenwells stayed put as it was working well.

I fished for another hour or so, catching the odd fish here and there but they still refused anything but that Greenwells. As the afternoon drew on and the hill cast its shadow over the river the hatch stopped, almost like turning off a light switch, takes dried up and it was time to call it a day. What a day it had been, using an age old traditional method, in an historic water in a glorious part of the country. I count myself very fortunate to be a member of the Derbyshire County Angling Club with the rich variety of rivers and stillwaters to choose between. This particular stretch of the upper Dove has to be one of the nicest spots in the country and the fishing lives up to it too.



Really Exciting Times Ahead

A new dawn beckons on the river Saone

The Covid situation was now less scary and regulations allowed a trip to France and we finally set off. We travelled via the channel tunnel, which was a great experience and a first for me, as in the past, I had only been by air and sea, although I did ride a motorcycle to Paris and Le Mans when I was a lot younger on a couple of occasions with some old friends, which now seems a distant dream anyway. This appeared to be a lot easier, and for my old back now maybe a bit kinder, as you just drive onto the train and park and stay in your vehicle, plus it's cheaper and better on fuel and probably better for the ozone layer as well. I remember thinking it was indeed a good experience - apart from the toilets which were closed, because of Covid apparently.

After a rest in James's house, I jumped on a short flight from England home to Belfast and now writing about

my first work out on the road in almost two years and it was fantastic to be back with likeminded people again and to eat, drink and talk fishing.

I must say my French is somewhat 'petit' and I have decided it would be good if, I tried to at least to learn a bit more. It was not really an option in the old school unfortunately, I think my choice went art and history followed by metal work and then I left to work at sixteen.

Once arrived, we toured to Burgundy in a van to film some coarse fishing, something that I really know little about as I am basically and always have been a trout and salmon angler. Nevertheless, here I was on a wonderful crisp, sunny, cold day, and I just needed to hang out and watch guys, who definitely knew what they were doing, fishing on the massive river Saone, a tributary of the Rhone.

Then, after a few days meeting our

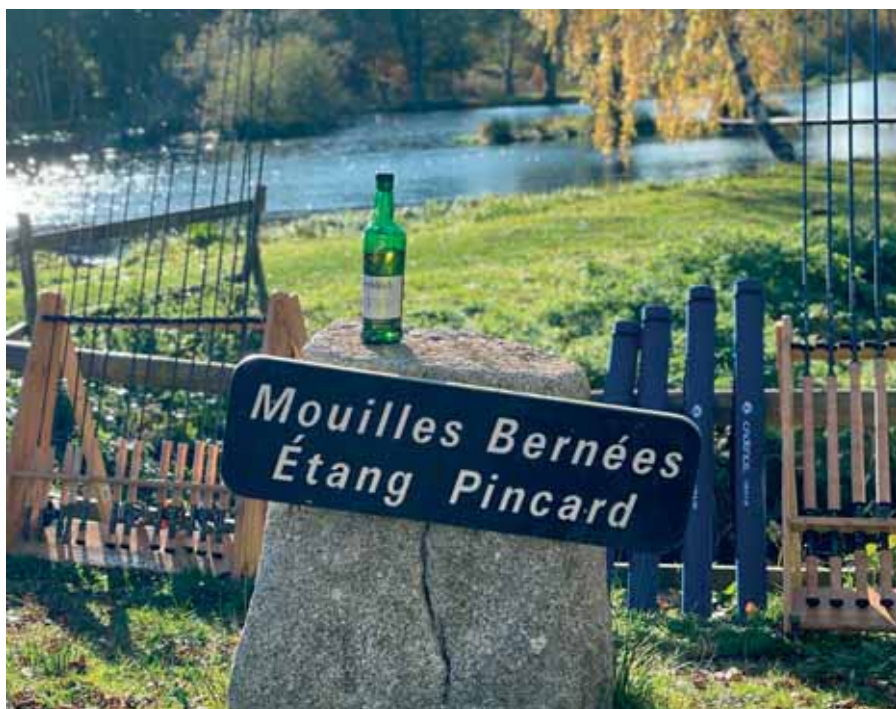
team in the flesh and not just on a Zoom meeting, we were to move on to something I am a bit more used to, a fly-fishing show. After all, this was the reason I was in France, to do a few demos and give casting lessons for a new company with old and new comrades.

Sometimes in life you do need to pinch yourself and this was one of those times. The show was to be held at a beautiful place called the L'Ephemere De Bourgogne and, interestingly for me, this was the region where the Gaul King, Vercingetorix, the first to unite the Gauls, failed in a revolt against Roman forces during the last phase of Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars. Sadly the proud chieftain of the Arverni tribe was executed in Rome back in (46 BC). Amazing. I do love a bit of history!

And now fast forward to my first event. Amid all the Covid restrictions



Stevie Teaching in France.



Ready for the show at L'Ephemere De Bourgogne

over the last two years our world changed drastically and this time on the journey, I had to jump through a few unfamiliar hoops. However, I was very pleased to do so, as everything that I usually worked at in the last few years had stopped due to Covid, including my income.

Not an easy time for a self confessed 'trout bum'

I was unable to run The Irish Fly Fair, our guiding trips in Norway with Go Fishing and Espen Andre Eilertson, something which we had done for ten years. Added to which there were no fly fishing events, like The North West angling show as well as teaching - not an easy time for a trout bum...I mean instructor of course. I am not complaining, as these things happen and I know I am a lot more fortunate than many in this crazy world.

I was always been told that if you have full belly and a roof over your head you're doing ok. Though I will admit it was a very stressful time for many of us self-employed folk. I even had to sell my beloved Harley Davidson to help pay a few bills, but in the grand scheme that was not the worst, even though it hurt and I still pine for a motorcycle. I have always ridden bikes, something which I have no doubt accelerated my arthritis. However, on the bright side, lockdown gave me a lot of time to fish, almost every day and mostly to the river Maine. Mind you I had a good time on Lough Erne and the Six Mile River too. There is no better way to clear the mind than fly fishing and it has always been a way for me to find solitude, a very easy way to isolate one's self, as wild fishing demands quietness and stealth.

I think it was Alexander Graham Bell who once said when one door closes another opens or something like that, and this is what happened to me when my old friend and colleague, and I know he won't like me saying so, without doubt one best known guides, Spey casters and rod designers in the world of fishing, Ian Gordon, gave me a call and asked me if



First wild trout of the season from the Six Mile water

I would be interested in joining a new company, but with a lot more input than I've have had in the past.

An exciting time for me on board a new company to create a range of fly rods

He had recently left Hardy where he designed their double handed salmon rods to join this project, so it was a big step and at the time. I had been with Scandinavian giants Guideline as a pro team ambassador which was very nice and I liked the kit, but this was something I could not turn down once I heard more about it, so I said yes, as I knew if Ian was involved it would be something pretty amazing and something I could get my teeth into and make a real difference.

He went on to tell me about the company, Cadence, which is a USA-based tackle manufacturer adding that we would be with the European arm of Cadence Fishing and that we would be adding a fly brand.

Cadence is a direct-to-consumer brand, selling products exclusively online via their own website and at consumer shows. Selling direct eliminates a retailer margin which not only allows the consumer to buy very high performance tackle at sensible prices, but also helps Cadence give back to good causes in angling. For example, the 'Go Fishing Give Back,' is the company's campaign to introduce the sport to young anglers and for every £50 (€100) spent with Cadence, they will provide free tackle to a child through one of the many charitable partners the company works with. Already, this has provided much needed equipment to budding young anglers across the UK and Ireland.

Another massive plus for me is that it's led by well-known UK all-round angler and another good friend James Robbins. Already, Cadence Fishing has developed a strong following in the UK, Ireland, and the rest of Europe for coarse angling products, producing a

wide range of rods, reels, poles, whips, luggage and nets for coarse match anglers. The company's core philosophy is to develop products in conjunction with top anglers, who can add input and help develop each rod to be the very best it can be, at realistic prices. The brand is agile, often bringing products to market that other companies shy away from, giving a diverse range of products to suit all types of angling.

So, over the last two seasons we worked with a lot of our angling friends on the fly brand rods, with me on single hand rods and Ian on double handed rods and we tested and tweaked a lot of rods and lines. We were able to fine tune the actions and use the very best technology and components that are available today . So some extremely exciting times have arrived as the team has a lot of experience, not only in fishing, but also working within the trade. It includes people like Pascal Grillot, a fantastic all-round French angler who has worked at the very top

levels in the trade. There are also Garasse Bertrand and Francois Deline as our ambassadors and instructors in France. Also on board the team is the wonderful Glenda Powell, who of course many of you will know already as certainly one of the top teachers of casting instructors in the world.

So very exciting times ahead and hopefully, the team will grow in the coming seasons. We are starting with a range of double handed rods, a range of Miro Spey rods and my own range of single-handed fly rods which cover small river to lough and reservoir rods. Pictured with this article are a just few of the fish which I landed while field testing.

Tight lines for 2022.

Stevie works full time as a fishing guide, writer and qualified game angling instructor. Please visit www.anglingclassics.co.uk and www.cadencefishing.co.uk for more information.



A large Dollaghan, took just before dark on the river Maine.

James nets Pascal's fish as the sun sets on the river Saone



Fly Tying

I first started tying flies when I was about 12 years old. A friend of my father's, Peter Foy, was a master fly-tyer and stories of his skill piqued my interest. I remember visiting Des Powel's fishing tackle and Jerry Scully's Guns & Tackle shops and admiring the flies they had for sale. Occasionally when opportunity arose, I visited Galway and always tried to drop in to Feeney's to admire the flies and see what the West of Ireland flies had to offer.

As I started to investigate what was involved in tying my own flies, I soon learned that fly tying is an art form. In earnest, I bought my first fly tying kit in Anthony Quinn's Fishing Tackle Shop, but soon realised I hadn't a clue where to start.

The Cova shop up the road became my library for magazines such as Trout & Salmon, Irish Angler, Fly Fishing and Fly Tying as well as the wealth of knowledge available from the owner Eamon, who took great pleasure in describing the different mayflies that he had had success with over the years. He described how the mayflies had long pheasant tails, light green olive, raffia bodies and plenty of French partridge.

One of my earliest memories of beginning my fly tying journey includes plucking feathers from a drake widgeon given to me by my father. It had been in my granny's attic and was never properly stuffed. As time went on and after many many hours spent at the vice involving countless thread breaks and feathers all over the place I was starting to get the hang of it. An uncle gave me a present of Peter O'Reilly's book "Trout & Salmon Flies of Ireland" and I would try to replicate the beautiful flies in the book as best I could with the level of skill and materials I had.

Around the same time as I was learning to tie my own flies, I was also beginning to dabble with fly fishing, so



John's flytying set-up is ideal with everything to hand

it was the perfect opportunity to put my flies to the test. One of my first successful flies was a wet Mayfly, tied using woodcock in the front hackle covering the green olive. I named it "Greenwood Glory" in honour of the Greenwood shoreline of Lough Ree where I caught a lovely 2½ lb brown trout with it. The Greenwood shore holds a special place in my heart as it is where a lot of time was spent swimming and snorkelling as a young lad with friends and my faithful springer spaniel "Max" and is now a favourite fishing spot.

As my success and skill developed, I became involved in competitive fly tying and secured a place on the Leinster Fly Tying Team and entered the

All-Ireland Fly Tying Championship. This was a wonderful but challenging experience. It required huge attention to detail and involved tying two identical flies, not an easy task. This experience, although challenging, contributed to me tying much neater flies.

It's your fly, your creation and nobody else has one!

Not only is the enjoyment of catching a fish enhanced by catching it on one of your own hand tied flies, but catching it on a hand tied fly of your own creation, not recreated from a book is a uniquely rewarding experience. It is your fly, your creation and nobody else has one. This is when it gets interesting.

You must question your fly and use

the answers to inform your next creation. Why did this fly work? The weather conditions are taken into account alongside your fly fishing technique, the season, what's happening on the water to name but a few of the considerations in assessing a fly's performance. That's what makes it remarkable. The laughable thing about this is that you may tie an identical fly

again in the future and never catch a fish with it. However, if it did catch a second fish, it would be carefully and precisely replicated and its special place in the fly box would be assured.

To this day, I still enjoy spending several hours at the vice tying any fly that may come to mind. It has taught me so much and opened a whole new world of fishing. It involves studying

the many fly patterns and experimenting with mixing various shades of colours and materials which to be honest can be a bit overwhelming at times, but immensely enjoyable nonetheless. I have proven the old statement to be true: *"The fly will catch the angler before the fish."* Well, I've been well and truly caught by the fly, but sure isn't that all part of the sport.

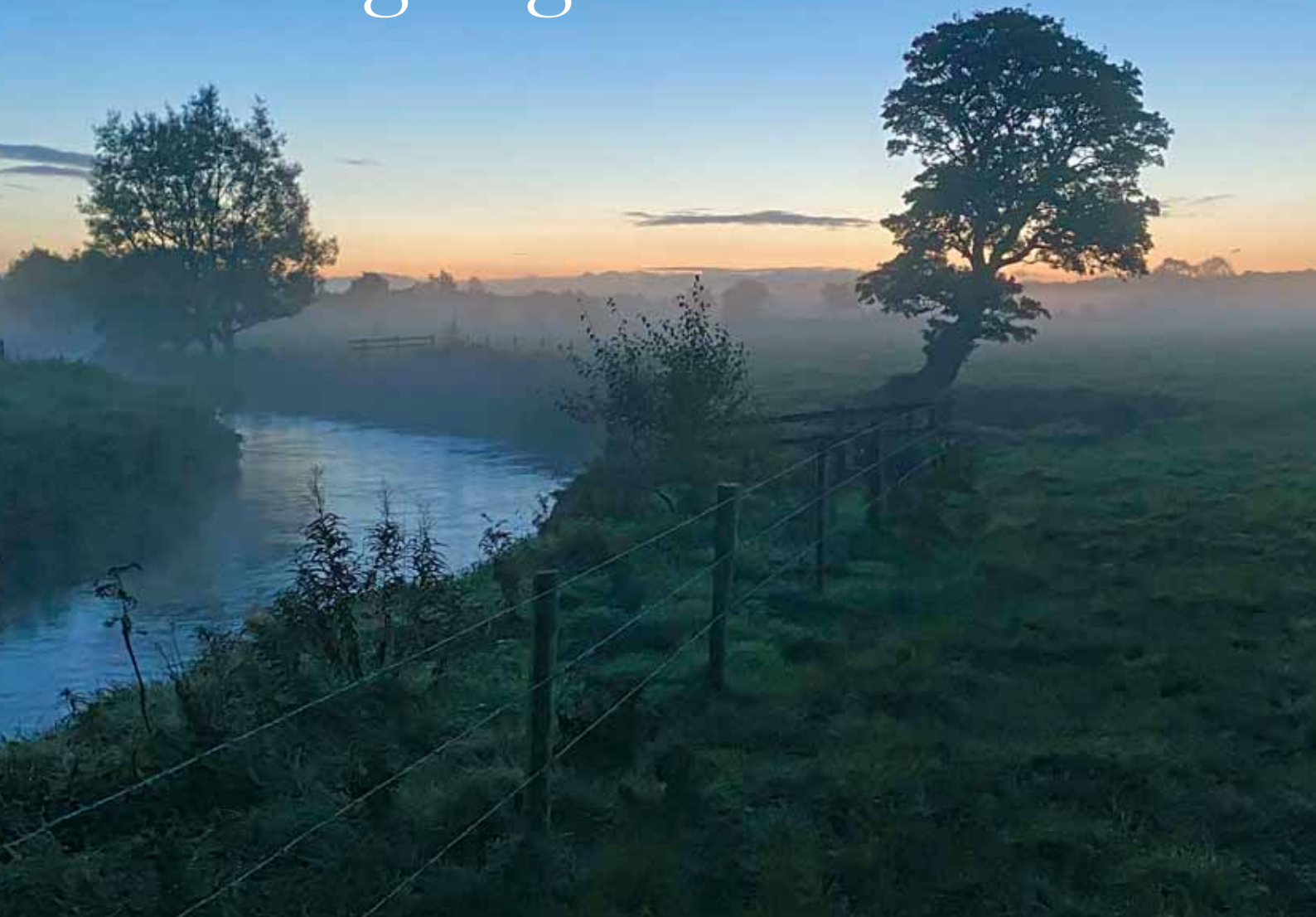


Top left: The Greenwood Glory

Top: A handful of Dry Mays and Spents

Left: Some wet flies which were tied by the Author

Angling Reflections



Another season ends and there's time to reflect

As a small boy I was fortunate to spend many happy times with my old dad's fishing mentor, Mr. Barr, who lived just up the street from my Granda's house in Donaldson Crescent. A veteran of WWII, 'oul' Barr cut a tall, lithe figure with square shoulders, advancing years forcing a slight stoop on his back. In my memory I can still hear his deep, gravelly voice and smell his aromatic pipe tobacco as he patiently imparted his knowledge to this little brother of the angle. He always wore a check shirt, frayed around the collar, a regimental tie, the battered tweed jacket with the pipe tucked in his breast pocket, and a plastic Mac – no gore-tex in those days.

We spent many an hour catching perch and eels off the sand barges in the

canal at Toomebridge, the wee red and white float bobbing and dipping as the fish guzzled the red worm suspended below. Mr. Barr loved to eat perch and would carefully fillet the bigger ones and an eel was a delicacy. Sometimes we would go to some little tidal stream on the Ards peninsula where the red and white float would work its magic on the school seatrout and wee flatfish. Mr. Barr would fish anywhere the bus or train would take him, or on my dad's big Vespa motorbike and, in later years, the old Morris Traveller with the Isocon-filled wooden panels.

Although he liked fly fishing, the war deprived Mr. Barr of the mobility to wade the rivers, so his weapon of choice was a Mepps spinner, which he could expertly drop on a sixpence, under the

overhanging bushes, into the back eddies, behind a big rock - anywhere a nice trout, dollaghan or salmon might have taken up station. A big flood might demand a copper and brass spoon or, if the notion took him, he would gather some dock grubs or a 'Garden Olive' - the worm.

Although his hands were damaged, he could manipulate the old Mitchell reel and glass rod with a dexterity that would have shamed most anglers. The tall figure walked with a halt and some of his fingers were missing – a legacy of the shrapnel and bullets that strafed the battlefields. The deep husky voice, breathing with damaged lungs, all reminders of weeks spent lying in wet trenches inhaling all manner of gas and fumes which permeated that



The Perdigon nymph suspended below a Klinkhammer proved effective

godforsaken atmosphere. The love of a good woman and the thought of once again tramping the banks of his beloved Northern Ireland rivers kept this man going through unimaginable horrors.

Mr. Barr loved the Maine, Ballinderry, Moyola, Clough, Kells, the wee Maine. He knew each of them intimately, along with all the characters who frequented them and also the farmers. Although the nights brought back memories of the snipers bullets, necrotic bodies, relentless shelling, his days by the river provided sanctuary to salve a troubled soul.

'Oul' Barr' taught me a lot, indeed much more than fishing

He taught me to show all men dignity and respect and to be considerate. He never mentioned politics in all the years I knew him. In those days, these rivers held an abundance of gamefish and nothing was wasted – my dad would say Mr. Barr was always on the lookout for a pheasant or hare freshly hit by a car.

Another thing about my friend was his reluctance to pay for a permit, I guess he reckoned he'd paid enough in the bits of fingers and calf muscle that he left behind in Caen in 1944. My dad would tell stories of the old boy feigning deafness when a bailiff was calling from the far side of the river! Anyway, the few shillings saved would buy a bottle of stout and a whiskey chaser on the way home as no fishing trip was complete without a visit to a local hostelry!

I hadn't thought about my old friend for a long time, but for me the last days of the fishing season are always a reflective time and it was while I sat under willow trees by the river watching the trout rise under the mantle of gold, yellow and orange leaves, that the first skeins of geese began to flight the river, their calls echoing far up the valley. Mr. Barr loved wildfowl and dad would often supply duck and a lone bean goose from his Strangford Lough 'fowling forays. The first Norlanders as the old fowlers called them, start to arrive as the fishing season draws to a close, the



This fly agaric or fly amanita was spotted almost at the water's edge

skeins can be seen migrating at great altitude. The arrival of the grey geese signal the arrival of winter, the year has turned once more.

Mr. Barr loved this time of year when salmon and dollaghan would be running the rivers in numbers. He told stories of the Ballinderry River at Coagh and 'The Joinings' on the River Maine where the fish would stack up in serried ranks and a skilled angler could make a good basket in reasonable conditions. The old boys' neighbours in Donaldson Crescent would often benefit if Mr. Barr had a good day by the river, it was the way of things in those days when people looked out for each other and appreciated fresh fish or game.

Old Mr. Barr and indeed my own father are long gone, but their legacy

lives on. They taught me to be patient, to observe, to appreciate and to value time spent outdoors. The men of Mr. Barr's generation endured unimaginable horrors so that we may be free to enjoy our lives, they were unwavering and resolute in their determination to protect their nation back home and wouldn't even mention their sacrifices much less complain about them. I understand Mr. Barr's love of the countryside, being by a river can be a balm for the soul.

To my mind our countryside and our rivers are part of our heritage worth protecting, money can't buy the joy they bring to a community – they provide a place for peace and relaxation, for walks, for sport, a haven for wildlife, a place for children to play, a tourist feature, a community asset. It's about

time these special places were valued and protected as they deserve to be, if there's one good thing to emerge from this terrible Covid pandemic it's a growing awareness of how important the outdoors is to our health and wellbeing, as angling clubs we can do our part to welcome and embrace initiatives to enhance the waterways, stop pollution and show the benefits a clean river can bring to a community.

'Commando tactics' and a surprise end to the season

Following a long summer of heat and drought, most rivers were reduced to listless trickles, algae covered the riverbeds, dollaghan refused to run and the trout retreated to the deeper pools. To walk the river was a depressing

experience; two hot summers in a row had seen off any chance of good fishing and the constant worry of undiluted pollution was always present. Indeed the Glenavy, Camowen, Three Mile Burn and Kesh rivers were all destroyed by this nightmare scenario.

Come the end of September, however, the rains arrived while we were salmon fishing in Mayo and when I next viewed the Six Mile Water everything had changed. The floods had flushed away the algae to reveal clean golden gravel and luxurious growths of water crowfoot glowing bright green as it swayed in the current. Huge shoals of minnows and fry populated the shallow runs and more exciting were the trout and small dollaghan now present in their old haunts.

For October, the weather was still unseasonably warm and this encouraged odd olives and some sedges to hatch. I enjoyed some sport for a few weeks, initially on a dry Bann Boatwing sedge,

a Bert Atkins (of 'Tightlines on the Agivey' fame) pattern I believe, then as the temperatures dropped a tiny Perdigon nymph suspended below a Klinkhammer proved attractive.

The low water demanded commando tactics – stay off the skyline, slide quietly into the river and wade carefully upstream, and a pair of gloves to pull yourself back up the steep banks through the nettles! In the low, clear water through the polaroids it was easy to see the fish moving across to intercept the dry fly or the gold flash as they intercepted the nymph, exciting fishing and totally unexpected at this time of year.

There were lovely wild brown trout over a pound weight and dollaghan to three pounds, all on the nine foot, 4 weight rod, a great way to finish the season after all the depression of the heatwave. Now the season has passed and the miracle of the spawning is beginning. Salmon and dollaghan are

forging through the pools in a dirty flood to populate the spawning redds and a new chapter begins again. Hopefully next year will provide better conditions for hatching flies, feeding trout and running salmon and dollaghan. Until then, we have our memories.

Taken late in the season and gently released back in the water



Federation of Irish Salmon & Sea Trout Anglers

Conaidhm na Slat Iascairí Bradáin agus Breac Geal

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F.I.S.S.T.A.

SALMON SEASON 2021 ENDS ON A HIGH THANKS TO NASF

While most of the rivers on the West coast of Ireland had generally an improved season overall, rivers such as the Crana in Inishowen were down on previous years. In our last column we were hopeful that last season's record numbers would be matched and thankfully we are happy to report that West Donegal rivers especially had an even better season of returned salmon than last year although seatrout are still a big concern.

Rivers that got much better water at the close season ended up with the best backend run of September fish for many years. Those lucky enough to be fishing in the last fortnight on the Glen River would have seen that many pools were stuffed with fish. So, we expect the redd count numbers will have to be up when we count in December. We acknowledge the improved protection has made a significant difference on our bays and freshwater but we believe that the 2018 North Atlantic Salmon Fund and ASF buyout deal has to be maintained and that must be our most urgent priority is to ensure our salmon continue to be protected in the North Atlantic feeding grounds so that they return to our natal rivers to spawn. One noticeable big change is that IFI

staff cooperated with angling clubs to enforce protection and habitat enhancement, a partnership way we have campaigned for.

We are grateful for the kind comments and feedback we continue to receive on the various issues raised in the last column such as the past failures of governments to stop the decline of our stocks of wild salmon and seatrout. We were particularly grateful for the support and suggestions on how we should lobby our minister to select a new team that

believes we can achieve improvements in our stocks in accordance with the Irish Implementation Plan lodged at NASCO. We have yet to receive a reply from the Minister Eamon Ryan TD on what he plans to do to convince his staff that his plan is feasible and achievable. Despite the pandemic limitations we succeeded in progressing the FISSTA Plan with the new IFI CEO, the new Department team and the new Minister Eamon Ryan TD.



Water levels and the joys of a spate river at the salmon leap near Teelin Co Donegal

PROTECTION OF OUR WILD ATLANTIC SALMON IN NORTH ATLANTIC

In Feeding Grounds

We still campaign intensely for our most urgent priority to ensure our improved salmon runs continue to be protected in the North Atlantic feeding grounds so that they return to our natal rivers to spawn. To maintain this agreement which NASF & ASF have negotiated for the benefit of every salmon nation. We can no longer get a free ride and have to contribute our fair share from the anglers Wild Salmon Conservation Stamp Fund which the state administer for the improvement of the wild Atlantic salmon habitat. We need to see the ending of all commercial draft netting in estuaries which survived the first buyout in 2007 and has taken far too many fish from their spawning beds since then.

We urge the Minister to live up to our international responsibility and grant funds to keep these agreements in place and protect these salmon in our North Atlantic feeding grounds.

In the Natal Rivers

As we go to print we have not

received the draft regulations for 2022 as yet but over 120 of our 145 wild salmon rivers are now closed to the taking of a salmon under the angling regulations and this continued pattern of river closures is unacceptable to our Federation. Closing river communities and economies down for unjustified reasons of the IFI is self-harming to our fisheries and unacceptable to us. While we support the scientific reason to conserve we need the new Minister to implement our visionary plan to return our salmon stocks to abundant levels.

SALMON FARMING IN IRELAND

We do not accept the policy of previous governments to support the licensing of open sea net-cage salmon farming, as the practice is unsustainable. We have made some progress in convincing the new regime in IFI to stand up for their salmon and confront the policies of the DAFM Minister Charlie Mac Conologue to regulate the salmon farming industry as Norway has done under their Norske Indusri plan that ends pollution, sea lice and protects

our wild stocks. We acknowledge the IFI new policy decision to legally challenge under a Judicial Review the decision of ALAB to allow the Shot Head application for a salmon farm in Bantry Bay to proceed.

PROGRESS IN RESTORING NIFF MEETINGS – MINISTER TO APPOINT A NEW CHAIRMAN AND OVERSEE IFI PROGRESS.

We must acknowledge the work which the CEO and Board have achieved in getting the NIFF back on track which we are told will happen very soon. The public utterances of department officials have indicated that salmon conservation is not achievable and that the state is wasting funding on such futile plans. We need Minister Ryan TD to recruit new policy believers and resume under the 2010 Act the now defunct National Inland Fisheries Forum meetings so that progress be made on many issues of urgency. Eg Ministerial appointment of competent anglers to state boards.

REVIEW OF THE ROD LICENCE AND TAGGING SYSTEM FOR ALL ISLAND ANGLING PLAN

As we go to print we are happy to report progress on this issue, as IFI have listened to our requests and launched a public consultation process on a new system for the 21st century. The decline in salmon angling is mainly due to the decline in stocks but lessons can be learned from our competitors in Scotland who have maintained a strong angling tourism industry due to the much smarter management of their sport and regulations. The opportunity now exists for North/South institutions to progress plans for a better future for all involved in salmon angling. We need an all island conservation plan from North and South Ministers to agree a new angling plan to promote and manage our business and sport.

Following the DECC introducing the Designated Salmonid Waters



Lady angler of the Year Cathy Rabbett ,from Derry excelling at her salmon angling on the Yellow River. Cathy, and husband Michael and Michael Junior have been fishing for over 30 years at the Salmon Leap.

bylaw, in which over 150 of the 180 submissions objected to the draft, IFI has been formally asked by the Minister to proceed with its proposal to develop an evidence-based management plan for seven lakes and to submit timelines for the plan to the Department by the end of September which we understand has been presented to the Minister.

IFI said the plan will primarily focus on key areas such as biodiversity and whole ecosystem conservation as the basis for the protection and development of wild salmonid stocks in particular, such as wild brown trout. He commented: "From our research to date, it's clear that the Western Lakes are under threat, and we must take action underpinned by best available scientific data to protect and conserve the unique status and importance of these salmonid waters in the long-term. The new management plan should inspire a positive vision for the future of the Western Lakes and serve to protect them as they are topographically distinct waters in terms of salmonid habitat." FISSTA have lobbied very hard to ensure the EU Habitats Directive is respected and adhered to in whatever is proposed. The seven lakes within the 'Western Lakes' grouping are:

- Lough Corrib (Galway fishery district)
- Lough Mask (Galway fishery district)
- Lough Carra (Galway fishery district)
- Lough Cullin (Mayo fishery district)
- Lough Conn (Mayo fishery district)
- Lough Sheelin (Limerick fishery district)
- Lough Arrow (Sligo fishery district)

INTER AGENCY APPROACH TO FISHERY HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PLANS

It is time to review the tendering by consultants on a special contractor list for new works to be financed by IFI. To date this system appears unworkable and were it not for the hard work and scrutiny of some diligent anglers, who understand and appreciate this technical work of



It's not possible to have good conditions for salmon fishing all the time on our spate rivers so we are always lucky to have the option for some deep sea fishing a few minutes away out of Teelin Pier. Here is a picture of Keelan Murray on holiday from Belfast, one of our youngest club anglers who was very lucky with this monster pollack when his Dad and group fished out at Carraigin Head in Donegal Bay.

habitat contracting projects, the Dodder and others projects could be seriously damaged beyond repair. Sometimes asking the hard questions does result in progress for the future of angling.

The resumption of cooperation and finance sharing by IFI and inter agencies such as OPW is indeed progress to be welcomed as habitat budgets have lost over €5m from finances traditionally allocated to these kind of works over the past five years. We are hopeful the CEO ably assisted by Declan Cooke and Greta Hennigan receives the support for extending these type of works into the

coming years, as salmon passage and spawning capacity must be increased if the stocks are to be improved.

FISSTA have campaigned for a return to the one stop shop which IFI staff and other state agencies operated during the TAM programme, when €19m of EU funded projects were delivered in a two year period. IFI have the long term experience in development in habitat rehabilitation works, and they also have authorised access and authority to waters where clubs and individuals may not. They are well placed to do this work and we would like to see a move by IFI return to these core duties.

The application process and criteria is seen by many clubs as very difficult. Angling clubs are the main contributors and, in a lot of cases, do not have such resources and this can make it extremely difficult for them to proceed with applications under the current scheme. The scheme can succeed if IFI adopt an inter agency to resolve the existing problems.

The authorities are still investigating Meenbog landslide, which marked the third landslide of 2020 and raises the question of why these peat failures are happening and whether we should brace ourselves for more in the future. To date nothing has been heard from all the inter state agencies on both sides of the border who were compiling various scientific reports. So far the PSNI and An Garda Síochána have not confirmed that a crime has been reported so this has left the politicians scratching their heads on both sides of the border.

Atlantic salmon take the biggest hit because they are a migratory fish. So, energy production is once again under severe scrutiny and our federation has been lobbying hard to get the campaign awareness raised to a level that serious remedial decisions are made to reduce the impact on our fish.

There are large-scale high-head hydropower developments in place on four Irish rivers (Shannon, Erne, Lee and Liffey) operated by Electricity Supply Board. ESB Fisheries Conservation work in various research arrangements with many third level institutions, along with the statutory fisheries body IFI and other more local stakeholders, angling clubs etc. The main focus of activity is related to improved upstream and downstream fish passage for salmon and eel, although recent activities have focussed upon the movement of sea lamprey and some within catchment movements (trout, perch, pike etc)..

Regarding small-scale hydropower, IFI have developed Guidelines on the Construction & Operation of Small-Scale Hydro-Electric Schemes and Fisheries in relation to legislation regarding upstream and downstream fish passage, screening, data to be contained in an EIS for small hydro, compensation flow, etc. We recommended that the planning authorities adopt these guidelines in their licence conditions.

We have had some movement such as the inaugural meeting of a working group tasked with recommending ways

to improve fish passage at Parteen on the River Shannon. The objectives were to propose ways to increase fish passage levels in Ireland's largest catchment (improving fish passage could improve aquatic environment and enhance local recreation and tourism); and any proposed pilot project could be pathway to solutions to fish barriers across Ireland. While ESB welcomed the new initiative, events have not moved on. However, communities on the cross border Erne, Lee, Clady and Liffey are now hoping to see the ESB go offshore for their future energy production.

Consultants CDM Smith have already published their roadmap for action 2021-2025 which they say will cost €10m for a draft and then final report by 2025 which will supposedly recommend a feasible roadmap. But we know now that with only 5% of the salmon getting up that dam, five more years will be too late to save the Shannon salmon. At the recent conference on barriers Marq Redeker of CDM Smith repeated the findings of the year old road map plan for which maintenance and fish passage is still the objective rather than decommissioning Ardnacrusha in favour of offshore wind turbine generation.



One of our junior members Dillon Rowan (16 years old) set the season record with a whopping 15 lb salmon which his Dad Denis recorded in this photo. Congratulations Dillon on a very very fine achievement.



Uganda - In Bell's Footsteps

'Walking in the footsteps of giants' in Karamoja, north eastern Uganda

The tracks we drove and the paths we walked were ones that had been used for eons – and likely the very same ones used by one of the most iconic hunters of all time, Karamoja Bell. I was in Karamoja, north eastern Uganda, to hunt with a very special rifle. I was using a magazine rifle built to Bell's own specification, manufactured by John Rigby & Co. in London, the gunmaker that had made his rifle, too.

And, to stay true to his way of hunting, I'd be using open sights in the configuration he specified when ordering his .275 Rigby at the turn of the previous century. Every now and then, while we stalked the shrubby undergrowth, easing our way closer to game, I'd feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Had Bell used this tree to lean against, or rest under 120 years ago? Was this animal a descendent of one that he had hunted? The one big

difference in the PiaNupe Wildlife Reserve more than century after Bell had pursued elephant here was the lack of these majestic beasts, but the long-term ambition is to return the world's largest land mammal to their traditional stomping grounds of Uganda in the future.

Karamoja Bell, or William Dalrymple Maitland Bell, is a name that should resonate with modern-day hunters. "He was a gentleman, a seriously selective hunter," Robin Hurt, himself a PH and renowned hunter, told me, as we talked in camp one evening. Robin and his son Roger had come to the reserve at the invitation of Prince Albrecht Oettingen-Spielberg, who took on the concession in 2009 by express consent of the Ugandan government. Setting up a safari camp in 2012, the team including camp manager and PH Ade Langley have been working tirelessly with the Ugandan Wildlife

Authority (UWA) to restore the wildlife in the area under the auspices of Karamojong Overland Safaris.

Robin had jumped at the chance to see the progress that had been made, having last hunted the area more half a century prior. "There weren't elephants then, either. While the elephants Bell himself hunted were carefully selected, after his time, indiscriminate ivory hunters came to the area and took the heart out of the population," Robin explained.

It wasn't just ivory hunting that caused the elephants and many other species to decline or disappear. The local tribe, the Karamojong are traditionally cattle people who graze wild areas and push out native fauna that compete with their domesticated beasts. Combined with an ever-increasing population and a history of political unrest in the area, including the rule of despot Idi Amin, there was a

speedy decline in species and numbers before the Reserve was created.

Even after the Reserve came into being, the local communities had no reason to preserve the wildlife in the area, nor to avoid overgrazing their cattle and thereby reduce habitat for wildlife. “But what I see happening here now is unbelievable,” Robin told me. “There are more animals than there were during my last trip here, 52 years ago. It shows how controlled hunting and cooperation with local communities can restore an area’s wildlife in less than a decade.”

Over several days, I was fortunate enough to hunt with PHs Gareth Lecluse and Ade Langley, who guided me with tremendous skill as we searched out indigenous plains game. Gareth’s skill was not only in placing us in the right areas, but, with my quest of only using open sights, getting incredibly close.

On many safaris, you’ll find yourself bumped about on the back of a vehicle for several hours spotting, then spend five breathless minutes stalking and getting into position more than 150 metres away from an animal, but this was a little different. Here, we’d be dropped into an area, and spend our time in Bell’s old hunting areas, getting closer and closer to the animals we were hunting, having the chance to observe them. It took a lot longer, but it felt like I was walking in the footsteps of giants,



The camp was a rustic tented lodging with views to die for

and indeed, there were still vestigial traces of elephants in the area.

The camp itself had the pleasant charm of simplicity that rustic tented lodging provides but with comfort and views to die for. I arrived on a full moon that lit up mount Elgon which borders with Kenya. A day of acclimatisation gave me the chance to take a few shots at a target – there was no need to check zero, of course, without a scope. But while I’d practised a lot back home, ensuring I understood my distances and how the rifle behaved, and the three rear sights which were regulated at 100, 300 and 400 yards. Of course I had no intention of making use of the longer distances, as for me one of the reasons for shooting with open sights was to stalk up close to animals rather than take them at distance. A good grouping, slightly high from 80m, gave me confidence that I was ready for what

was to come. Feeling rested and ready, I spent that first day relaxing in camp.

In this way, a slow, but far more rewarding hunting method, we tracked down an old Jackson’s Hartebeest bull on the fourth day of our safari, closing in on it and finally managing to come within 120m. I had two invaluable tools to aid my open sight shooting; Leica’s handheld compact CRF 2800.COM rangefinder and shooting sticks. This apparatus allowed me to accurately gauge my distances and to be completely stable ensuing I would not over-stretch my skill and to make only the most ethical shots with the 140gr Hornady soft point bullets.

Hunting with open sights is not dissimilar to hunting with a bow in my opinion, having done both. The limiting factor to longer distances is eyesight, in particular the precision required to aim at a given spot on an animal which



Working with the communities there is an arranged plan regarding cattle grazing



The author taking time out to savour the majestic surroundings



I was using a magazine rifle with open sights was built to Bell's own specification by John Rigby & Co

beyond 150m is totally covered by the bead of the foresight. The fieldcraft and stealth required to get closer to animals was very similar. The disappointments at close quarters are many, but the satisfaction of success is amplified significantly more than slotting something with a scope at 200m, which by comparison feels far removed, and not unlike looking at a screen. Nothing beats the thrill of nestling the bead of the foresight in the notch of the rear, then aligning with your intended mark on the target. It's an art with smaller game, it requires patience then more patience but is ever so pleasing to pull off.

Two days later, we came across a suitable old male Bohor reedbuck – a diminutive creature, but beautiful and delicate. We managed to stalk within 130m of it which was close enough for my now increasing understanding of open sight hunting. My final hunt, on my last full day, was for a Defassa waterbuck. This was incredibly special – it is a species I've long wanted to hunt and one I have passed up on before waiting for the right situation. After all, for me, it is not all about measuring tapes. Following an early start, we got stalking and managed to get amongst numerous waterbuck in bushy area beside a drying riverbed.

With the benefit of so much cover, we were able to hunt in the shadows and approach undetected to within 20 metres of a fine old buck, the closest shot of the week. Some hunters go to Africa and shoot dangerous game at close quarters with open sights, I would argue the challenge of hunting smaller animals with a "sweet little Rigby rifle," as Bell himself described the model I was hunting with, is as rewarding as you can make an African hunting experience. This form of hunting is hard to beat.



Leica's handheld compact CRF 2800.COM rangefinder was invaluable

The evenings were fascinating – for there, too, I was in the presence of giants. Not only Robin, the legendary PH, but also Ade, who runs Karamojong Overland Safaris on the ground, and Prince Albrecht, whose vision and passion has been instrumental in the project. It was fascinating to hear these three true gentlemen, all hugely experienced hunters and passionate conservationists, talk about the PiaNupe Reserve, about the changes that time had wrought, the prospects for the future and tell stories about Karamojo Bell, or their own hunting experiences.

We were honoured to host Frederiko Kizza one evening in camp – Chief Warden for Mt. Elgon Conservation Area which incorporates a national park and three wildlife reserves. Frederiko works under the Ugandan Wildlife Authority and is a great supporter of the Karamojong Overland Safari project. I spent a few hours talking to him about why this project was working so well. Frederiko's clear and concise manner of speaking showed his conviction that controlled sport hunting was yielding enormous benefits for both wildlife and communities in the area. "It has been found to be true that hunting for conservation is possible," he told me, as we sat in camp, our only light coming from the big bright moon. "We've had 10 years of sport hunting in the PiaNupe reserve now, and we are seeing more species and bigger numbers of animals. It is directly related." Frederiko has been working with many of the



Shooting sticks were key to my open sight shooting

communities, but also to control poaching in this and other areas: "Poaching was a terrible problem, and the few animals that were here you could hardly find, they were always hiding. But we now see that the communities are pointing out poachers to us, and a lot of the poachers we arrest is because of local people informing us. The communities can see the wildlife increasing, but they can also now legally eat the game meat harvested.

"In addition because of controlled hunting, the old, ill or lame animals are hunted, which means that the young, strong and healthy ones can breed more." Frederiko made it clear that it was not only a reduction in poaching, but also the selection of animals that helped the wildlife populations in the area. The fact that a good revenue was brought into the region also helped: "The hunters take the hides and the trophies, but the communities get the meat and a good part of the revenue from each of the hunts. It makes them see more value in the wildlife than just bushmeat, and it makes them respect it. They see it, they get income, they still get to eat it, they want to conserve it."

Ade, who manages the project on the ground was also convinced that cooperation was, along with the benefits brought directly to the community, a deciding factor in the success of the project. "We work incredibly closely with the local people and 75% of the trophy fees go to the local communities," he told me. We also give

them the bulk of the carcasses – that which we don't consume in camp. This is an area that is very protein deprived in diet, so that is a huge benefit.

Before we started this, there was a huge amount of human encroachment on the PiaNupe Reserve. There was a lot of charcoal burning and of course cattle, which led to smaller and smaller patches of good habitat for wildlife. We represent the first seasonally permanent presence here for more than 50 years." Ade and his team have a permanent presence managing the reserve with UWA as the supervisory partner, and conduct safaris through the four month dry season. "We've tried and I think succeeded to make the villages our allies, rather than alienating them. Places like this need that, but they also need the support of the government and we are getting that, as well as working closely with the Ugandan Wildlife Authority. We work with the communities to ensure that the cattle aren't grazed freely, but that it is on arrangement, and planned." As Ade explains, while cattle are an issue, you cannot go back a century and get rid of them – a more modern and flexible arrangement must be found.

A sign of the success is not only the numbers of animals, but also the species that are slowly returning. Soon, the plan is to reintroduce giraffe and the very special Ugandan kob, a rare species of kob that is unique to Uganda. And, as Ade says, while straight photo safaris or tourist safaris do bring a little income,

they cannot be compared to hunting income: “The neighbouring national park has thousands of visitors a year. The benefits to the communities there are on a par with what we do here, but the elephant in the room is the human footprint. Here, our footprint is tiny – we are here for a short season, employing probably the same number of people, but for a handful of clients.”

As we enjoyed the last setting sun of my Ugandan trip, I quizzed Robin about his time here 52 years ago: “I was the most junior hunter here. There were some of the most well-known of the professional hunters here: Brian Hern, Eric Anderson and a few others. I was only 23 years old, so it made a huge impression on me. I was incredibly struck by the beauty of it then. The vegetation is very similar today, but there are some changes.

When I was here, there were lots of lion, but the cattle numbers have increase dramatically, so it is hardly surprising that lions were killed. There are fewer zebra too, but by and large, there is far more wildlife now than when I was here, which is remarkable. Buffalo, for example – we’ve seen herd of 120 or more, which is highly unusual from what I saw half a century ago. “There weren’t elephants here 52 years ago, and there aren’t now, but Frederiko told me that they are moving back into areas where they haven’t been seen for

many many decades, so I feel that there is hope for them here, too.

The Ugandan Government could not have found a better person than Prince Albrecht to entrust the well-being of the Pian Upe Game reserve to. How he and Ade are running this is the only way, I believe, to bring wildlife back to these areas. It is what we do in Tanzania, too, and what has saved wildlife in Namibia. The communities are our eyes and ears, they inform us when there are poachers or when there is a sick animal or anything going wrong. As long as there is reasonable grazing access, this is a plan that will secure the future for the wildlife of the region. When I was a boy, there were islands of people surrounded by wildlife. Today there are islands of wildlife surrounded by people.”

The last word in the account of my open sight adventure on such hallowed ground must go to our host, Prince Albrecht. His vision and determination has been the catalyst and driving force for such a successful project in the PiaNupe Reserve, bringing hunting and conservation together for the benefit of local communities and wildlife. He also happens to have a frighteningly good encyclopedic knowledge of Karamoja Bell and his stories of the area: “What Robin has said about numbers gives me such encouragement, as does the fact that the Ugandan Government

acknowledges that this project is working as a model. It’s astonishing to hear what it was like 52 years ago when Robin hunted here in his 20s. I’m hopeful that we can stay here for a long time, and help the eco-system in the region for the future. Bell’s personality moves me – he learned the language and loved it, and, like every hunter, loved the landscape. He didn’t only hunt elephant – he needed meat to feed his entourage and hides for the leather – he talks of going through six pairs of shoes in a year.

When you read his books, you might think that there were elephants around every corner, but Bell would walk for days, weeks or months to track elephants, and, as Robin has mentioned, was highly selective. What becomes clear is that he succeeded only because he was good at making the locals his allies in the hunt. I like the fact that we are doing the same – we are forming long-lasting partnerships with people here and working towards a better form of management with their help.” To visit Karamoja and PiaNupe Wildlife Reserve: ugandaprohunts.com

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(Rigby’s limited edition W.D.M Bell Highland Stalker rifle was built exactly to Bell’s specifications, and is part of Rigby’s heritage series. An ivory front foresight and custom design rear half-moon sight offer three distances, with the option of a Rigby rear sight regulated at 65, 150 and 250 yards.)



Controlled hunting ensures that only the old, ill or lame animals are hunted. This old Defassa waterbuck had been selected to cull

Curlew Conservation Programme in Ireland

Curlew are vulnerable ground nesting birds

Curlew are beautiful birds that have played a significant role in Ireland's heritage being represented in place names, storytelling, poetry, music, coinage and folk lore. They are a large wader with greyish brown colouring with dark streaking standing tall on long bluish legs with a majestic long down curved bill, their call is evocative and easily recognisable.

Concerns have been growing about the Curlew's survival – in the late 1980s, between 3,300 and 5,500 pairs were estimated to have been breeding – today that is believed to be no more than 150. This represents a decline of at least 96 per cent. This decline is due to multifaceted pressures such as changing land use and agricultural practices, afforestation, land fragmentation, industrial peat harvesting, a decline in invertebrates and predation. In 2016, wader bird ecologist Dr Alan Lauder calculated that without action, the species could die out as a breeder by 2026.

The Curlew Conservation Programme (CCP) was established in

2017 by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). It is now a partnership programme involving both the NPWS (of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. This conservation work is deemed essential even under level five lockdown because Ireland's breeding Curlew are in desperate need of protection if they are to be saved from extinction.

Within the framework and structure of the CCP, there is an emphasis on local – with local teams engaging with local landowners and communities to apply relevant measures at a local level. These Curlew Action Teams (CATs) search out and protect nesting areas and, critically, engage with landowners and local communities on their importance to the survival of Ireland's Curlew.

The programme has focussed on the most important strongholds in Ireland for breeding Curlew with nine Curlew Action Teams working in the Stack's Mountains in Kerry, Lough Ree, Roscommon and Mayo, Leitrim, Monaghan, Donegal, Lough Corrib,

Laois and Kildare, Slieve Aughties. Last year, 42 breeding pairs were confirmed, of which at least 26 reached hatching stage with a minimum of 57 chicks hatched. At least 14 pairs produced fledglings, putting the breeding success rate at a minimum of 33 per cent.

Curlew Action Teams

1. Stack's Mountains
2. Lough Rea
3. North Roscommon-East Mayo
4. Leitrim
5. North Monaghan
6. Donegal
7. Lough Corrib
8. Slieve Aughties
9. Laois-Kildare



Curlew Conservation is taking place across 9 Areas

This is my second year working on the CCP and as I walk the bog and country lanes listening and looking, I know I am very privileged. Having grown up in the North West of Ireland on my family's farm and being involved in country sports all my life, I have a deep appreciation for nature.

I am watching spring unfold in all its glory. Each day new delights meet me. The emergence of hibernating insects and new plant growth is a marvellous rebirth to witness accompanied by the delight of birds in vibrant new feathers claiming territories and filling the air with courtship songs. My days are filled with the beautiful music of sky larks, meadow pipits, stone chats, wrens, snipe, robins, blackbirds and many more. The winter visiting birds are leaving as the returning migratory birds begin to arrive.

Monitoring the return of Ireland's native breeding Curlew

I am, waiting and watching, watching and waiting and always listening, surveying and recording, watching over known nesting and feeding areas and continually on the lookout for new ones. Working as part of a team we are eagerly monitoring the return of

Ireland's native breeding Curlew and each day brings valuable reports from local people and landowners who are invested in the success of the CCP.

We have been lucky this year to have some good weather for the start of the programme, but we are all aware that this will not last. In this job we need to be hardy. Our work needs to be completed whatever the weather throws at us and the best time to survey is in the hours immediately after dawn and immediately before dusk.

We are all very aware as we drive to and from the sites that the roads and streets are quiet as many people are still restricted by the level five lockdown. We realise we are privileged not only to be part of the effort to save Ireland's Breeding Curlew but also to be back at work and out and about. The majority of our work involves lone work in remote areas making it easy to adhere to Covid 19 Government recommended protocol.

Farmers and landowners who have Curlew nesting or feeding on their land can offer huge hope to Curlew Conservation by implementing simple measures. Without the cooperation of landowners Curlew will not survive. Curlew are ground nesting birds and as such they are very vulnerable. Any reports of Curlew between mid-March

and June would be very helpful as although large these birds are secretive and elusive in their nesting areas. Once nests are detected, nest protection fences are erected to minimise mammalian predation.

Many Curlew Action Teams work closely with local gun clubs

Predation Risk Management is a vital part of the Curlew Conservation Programme and many of the Curlew Action Teams work closely with their local gun clubs. Nest Protection Fences pioneered in Ireland by the CCP have proven very useful in helping Curlew hatch their eggs, giving an increased chance of the next generation being reared to fledging.

Another very real risk for Curlew is disturbance from humans, stock and pets. It is very important to keep dogs on a lead in sensitive areas. While the bogs and rough pastures may seem empty they provide habitat for many ground nesting species, so keeping dogs on the paths and tracks is vital for the success of these birds.

It is also important not to let dogs harass birds at the seaside young birds and failed breeding birds often group together in feeding flocks these birds are building up their reserves for future breeding attempts. In the winter it is possible to see large flocks of Curlew feeding at the coast as Ireland's Curlew population is boosted by migratory visitors that travel to exploit Ireland's rich feeding grounds and milder winter weather these Curlew need to build up their reserves so that they are able to withstand the rigours of egg laying, incubation and chick rearing.



The best time to survey is immediately after dawn and before dusk

The Red Mills Interview

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Albert Titterington interviews Shauna McGroarty on her 'dual approach' to showing and working her golden retrievers.

When chatting some years ago with Nigel Carville while I was shooting at Drumbanagher Estate, he said that when he read our magazine many years ago, the first pages he turned to were the ones featuring the gundog interviews. Many other people have requested that we make this a regular feature, so we have 'kicked off' the current series with a rather unique one with Shauna McGroarty.

Unique because Shauna is not only one of an increasing number of female trainers and handlers but quite uniquely has had success in both the field and showing.

Q : Shauna. Can I take you right back to the start and ask you what

was your first dog and when and how you acquired it?

A : My first Golden Retriever was given to me when I was 2 years old by my godmother, Miriam, his name was Paddy and my parents and I later had a couple of Goldens as a family. Kim was my second Golden Retriever, she was training to be a police dog but she didn't work out. She was an amazing dog and went with me everywhere.

Q : When did you purchase your first golden retriever (a) pet or show and (b) working and trialling What was their breeding and their names ?

A : I left for University in Glasgow when I was 18 and I did not return to NI until I was 29, my priority on returning

was buying my own house and my own Golden Retriever (these two tasks went hand in hand). I acquired my first Golden Retriever from Uel Craig (Lawpark Kennels) in 2006. Bella's KC name was Lawpark Jazz Singer at Tamniarn and she was from show breeding. My interest was stimulated for working and a couple of years after this I purchased my first working line Golden out of Peter Bate's FT Ch Birdsgreen Sweet Reward of Castleman's. His name is Barney (Amberdolly Hamlet at Tamniarn) and he is 14 and still very much with us.

Q : What is your prefix and why did you choose it?

A : My prefix is Tamniarn and it has family roots.



Shauna in action handling one of her Golden Retrievers during a field trial

Q : Where and when was the first trial you ran in and how did you get on?

A : My first trial was at Shane's Castle with Barney where we came 2nd.

Q : With which dog did you win your first trial awards and on what ground and what quarry?

A: Shane's Castles which is combination of green fields, heavy cover and woodland.

Q : How many trials awards have you?

A : Oh, I am not actually sure. I stopped counting the novice awards in exasperation.

Q : How many Bench Champions have you made up? What are their names?

A : I campaigned Bonnie in the UK, when I could afford to, and made her up to a GB Champion but never managed to get her Irish title. She made her full title up at a field trial where she completed her SGWC. She has a RCC winning Crufts daughter, Martha who was very lightly shown and a GS and Best in Show winning grandson, Paddy, who I am currently campaigning. He started off his career by winning best puppy dog at Crufts in 2020.

Q : Which of your dogs to date would you rate as (a) your best working dog (b) your best show dog and why?

Working - My best working dog to date is Tealcreek Hamish (a son of Barney who also produced two other FT

Ch's in this litter). He has everything I am looking for in a dog, a perfect example of the breed from temperament, head, conformation and movement. Kind to all living things, you can take him anywhere and he is such a loyal dog. An honest dog to the end, training him was so easy, with so much natural ability and a strong desire to please. He is a Field Trial winner, however I missed out on his best years as my daughter, Kate, was born around the same time and Kate came first. He is retired now from trialling and stud work, but he still loves to pick up and snuggle up on the sofa.

Showing – My current young dog, Paddy, is the best dog I have bred to date, I've achieved much of what I was



A fine specimen ready for the dog show

looking for here however it's too early to say what way his career will progress, so I will have to say my Ch Tamniarn Sybil. She had huge ring presence with an ever wagging tail and I absolutely loved showing her. She took centre stage and powered around the ring, so light on her feet and enjoyed every moment. She gathered quite a fan base, she was such a character and people used to comment about how much she adored me but it was actually the piece of cheese I had in my hand! I owe her so much.

Q : Through your career you must have met, seen and been influenced by many handlers can I ask you who of these handlers most influenced or impressed you?

A : In the ring I enjoyed watching the late Anne Woodcock UK (Stanroph), she handled her dogs with such ease and poise and very much at one with her dogs. In the field, Philippa Williams UK (Castlemans) was probably the handler I admired, with the above also applying and I admired how assertive she was and the way in which she handled, sharp and precise. Here in Ireland, Bobby Robertson was a fantastic coach when it came to handling. There are lots of great handlers here, too many to mention.

Q : Other than your own dogs which goldens have you seen that you would rate as some of the best you have seen or judged? (a) showing (b) working ? What impressed you about these dogs?

A : Showing - Eng Ch Napoleon Uber Den Wolken to Chinnordale SGWC owned by Roy and Lindsey Maynard from the Chinnordale kennels. Everything about him is breed type. Nothing is overdone from his chiselled head to his overall balance and movement. He has the beautiful golden temperament and regularly picks up for Roy in Norfolk. Much of their breeding is behind him.

Working – John Williamson's IN FT Ch Gorton's Gaelic Prince (who is a son of FT Ch Birdsgreen Sweet Reward of Castleman's). He had bags of style, a super nose, speed and commitment, he

had a huge amount of heart when working and I loved watching him. The dog and handler were always very much at one.

Q : What do you look for when judging a dog?

(a) In the showing (b) working
A : I have not judged in the ring before but if I were to judge, movement and breed type with a clean balanced outline are the things that appeal to me. I like a solid four square dog, the sort of structure required for a hard day's work and I like the correct coat type, regardless of colour. I also like to see a dog on its toes and looking involved.

I have judged in AV trials and tests only. When watching breed stakes, a golden going out with drive, style and natural game finding ability are things that appeal. A golden hunting with its nose to the ground, looking committed with nice tail action is a must. Generally a golden might take in a little more area than a Labrador, if handlers become nervous of this the golden can look robotic if the dogs are started and stopped trying to hold them tighter when in training, I suppose it's a balancing act trying to maintain flow and control so it looks effortless between dog and handler when in the field. As an air scenting breed, there is nothing nicer than watching a golden using this to their advantage and also a handler taking advantage of this, beauty in motion!

Q : What changes have you seen over the years in judging and running trials that (a) you think are positive and (b) more negative?

A : A more positive approach to training has developed over the years and the fact that people are willing to try new approaches in itself is positive. You can see the benefits when the dogs are being handled. I think the level of work in the Golden Retriever breed stakes in GB has also improved over the years. People are asking more from their dogs and they are getting it. Many more women are now involved in trialling, and generally this has had a positive impact.

Q : How important is nutrition in conditioning your dogs for trials? What food do you use and why?

A : A dog will never be able to reach its full potential on a lesser diet which is why I have been using Red Mills for years. It has the right balance of everything needed to help a dog achieve peak fitness which is also important for the show ring and a gleaming coat.

Q : As well as a handler you have developed a reputation as a breeder of good dogs and these dogs are in demand throughout the world. Can you tell us (a) which KC recommended screening tests you use? (b) why you think it is important that breeders should use the KC recommended Health Screening Tests? And (c) what you look for in a dog and bitch that you are going to breed?

A : All of my dogs are screened for eyes, hips and elbows. I am not particularly caught up in results, otherwise I would have eliminated some fantastic dogs that I have used in the past. However the screening is very



Two of Shauna's Golden Retrievers at a shoot

important as it allows breeders, along with studying pedigrees, to make informed choices. Currently there are no priority DNA tests for Golden Retrievers and, as such, I do not DNA test.

I think the Irish in general have a reputation for breeding good dogs and horses. Breeding is a constant learning process and I have still much to learn which is why I always take note of what the very experienced people have to say. I am looking for a dog to compliment my bitch and I will never breed from a bitch or a dog if I think it has a fault that will be difficult to correct. Temperament, breed type (movement for the ring) and (hunting style for work), are all equal priorities. Most of all a good feeling about the dogs and the combined pedigree. Every litter is an education.

Q : You must have had many highlights as a trainer and handler as well as some disappointments can you share with us (a) your highlights? (b) your biggest disappointments?

A : Every day being out with the dogs is a good day but some of my most enjoyable moments have been out on training days on moors and highlands with likeminded people where the rest of the world disappears. Disappointments - I have had so many 'almosts' with Barney, my first trialling dog, many a time I walked away with tears of disappointment but it was short-lived. We had so much fun though. Family commitments have also meant a few super dogs have had to take a back seat in terms of competition, however they still give lots at home and I wouldn't change a thing.

Q : You have been mainly associated with training goldens, what qualities do you look for in your own dogs?

Biddable, focused, stylish and the ability to switch off. Nose, drive etc should be a given if you are keeping a dog for work and then some of the other things can be trained, but natural ability and lots of drive makes for an easy life.

Q : You obviously have trained both working bred and show bred dogs for work. What differences have you found?

A : Both my show and working dogs have natural ability, style, speed and are mostly biddable. If we are talking about trialling dogs, then the show dogs may not cope as well with pressured situations, ie too much handling can make them switch off and some lack the motivation to continue all day, yet allow them to run self-employed all day, and it's not an issue! If I had more time, I have absolutely no doubt however, that a couple my show stock would trial and would have the potential to win a breed stake.

Q : Do you prefer handling dogs or bitches?

All things being equal I don't have a preference however bitches coming into season can make things tricky if the timing is inconvenient.

Q : Have you trained any other breeds?

Labradors to open level in trialling.

Q : Why do you think the golden is the breed most suited to your training methods

A : I connect with them easily. I have found with training Labradors you have to be more structured and repetitive with often baby steps in comparison to a Golden. With Labradors, sometimes even one occasion of jumping ahead is enough to make you have to go back a few steps and start over again. Goldens are more forgiving, unless they don't like you!

Q : If you didn't have golden retrievers which breed would you have?

A : I have Labradors. I like some terrier breeds.

Q : On what grounds do you train and what do you like about them?

A : Mostly my own ground these days as it's hard to get away. I live on farmland where there's anything from green fields and rivers to bracken hills and heather.

Q : Do you take the dogs picking up – if so where?

A : Yes, over the years I have picked up in a lot of different places but mostly Shane's Castle, Tayto Castle, Glennoo, and more recently Beltrim Estate where the late Adam Wilson ran a fantastic shoot along with his dad Ivan.

Q : What is your favourite Trial ground and why?

A : Gortin. Ivan and the team have always been really friendly and he runs a great shoot. You get to see some lovely dog work and I love the terrain. I also like Benvardin Estate outside Ballymoney, there is a mix of everything you would expect in an estate and it's also a really well run shoot.

Q : What sort of quarry do prefer trialling on?

A : Probably a mix moorland and bracken.

Q : When not judging, training or breeding what do you like to do outside of country sports?

A : Spending time with my family and close circle of friends.

Q : How have you got on this season?

A : I don't have a trial dog for this season but I am working on it for next season.

Q : What would your advice be to anyone who wanted to get in to trialling goldens?

A : Watch the top dogs and handlers work whether it is in a trialling or a training situation, understand how the dogs work. Also look at different dogs and choose the lines you like. Most of all enjoy the breed and develop a thick skin.

Q : What ambitions have you fulfilled with your dogs and which ones do you still want to achieve?

The immediate goal posts are always moving but the most important thing for me is to develop a sound solid line of Golden Retrievers, with breed type and a dog that has not changed beyond all recognition, and as a result found itself classified as something other than a Gun Dog. I want my daughter, Kate, to enjoy the breed I grew up with and hopefully her children can too.

A PRE CHRISTMAS SHOOT WITH HIGH BIRDS & BUBBLY

I was never really a great one for champagne, although in my youth I undoubtedly managed my share at hunt balls, weddings and such like festivities, but on one memorable occasion it truly became the nectar of the gods - it was during the war. A time when champers was only to be found where there had been a well stocked cellar at the outbreak of hostilities.

Having been invalided out of the army early in the war, I was fortunate enough to be appointed manager of Colonel Devereux's estate in the Vale of Aylesbury. The Colonel was a dynamic personality, a very high powered industrialist, a leading figure in aircraft production, so vital to our survival, and an MFH. Although he could not get out with his hounds as often as he would have liked due to the pressure of work, he vehemently believed that one of the issues we were fighting for was to retain

our sporting heritage. He was, also, a keen shot and was a partner in a shoot at Lymington, which abounded The Solent, with John Howlett, chairman of Weiworthy Pistons, a company of great importance in the world of aircraft production.

I seem to recall it covered some five thousand acres and they had been able to retain one gamekeeper, Jack, who had been turned down for the army because he had hammertoes. However, whilst he carried out his duties as a gamekeeper, for much the same reason as the Colonel retained his pack of hounds, first and foremost his main job was as warrener, attempting to control the hordes of rabbits that inhabited the farms that made up the shoot and, at times, deal with the vast flocks of pigeons that, in hard weather, could devastate a field of such essential crops as kale in a matter of days. Both were much sought after

being un-rationed and Jack more than paid his wages from the sale of these, plus what expenditure was necessary to maintain the shoot.

It seemed seldom that the partners were both free to indulge their sport at the same time. However, this was not the only problem to be overcome and currently it seems almost unbelievable, for when they were able to get together it was very difficult to make up a team of eight guns. Firstly, because cartridges were only available, through the War Agricultural Executive Committee, to farmers for vermin control, or to those specifically employed for this purpose.

Jack, the keeper, reported that there was a great stock of birds

Many with foresight had laid in a stock early in the war, but equally a



The beating team could be seen approaching, flags flapping, over a slight rise

great many more had not. This led to my receiving a phone call one Thursday evening, around mid November 1941, from the Colonel. The conversation went something like this, "Michael you shoot don't you?" "Yes sir". "Good. Have you plenty of cartridges?" I hesitated for a second wondering if this was some sinister ploy to relieve me of some of my carefully acquired and guarded stock. Before I could reply the Colonel laughed, "Its alright I'm not after your cartridges, but if you have a reasonable supply. I'd like you to come and shoot at Lymington - it will be our first day this season and Jack, the keeper, says there's a great stock of birds." I quickly replied that I would be delighted.

I then received my instructions, namely to be at the Colonel's home at Stoke Poges at 2.00 pm the next day and to bring an overnight bag. Further, that he wasn't taking Wren (his chauffeur) and I would drive. This was truly icing on the cake, for the Colonel had two Bentleys and many times since being in his employ I'd longed to get behind the wheel of either of them.

We arrived at John Howlett's around 5.45 pm, our cases, guns etc being quickly whipped away by the butler. I was introduced to our host, then to an American General and another house guest. I was quickly to learn from the

Colonel that the General in fact was not truly a general in the military sense. It was the time of the Lease Lend Agreement (the Marshall Plan) with America and various leading experts from the aircraft industry, when coming to England to advise, were given a military rank. We were told that dinner would be early and somewhat hurried, as a meeting between our host, the Colonel, two senior members of the staff of Weiworthy Pistons and the General was scheduled for eight o'clock.

The following morning the countryside was white from a heavy frost, a chill wind sweeping in from The Solent, and whilst there was a light covering of cloud there was every indication that it would remain dry. At 8.30 am a tractor and trailer drew up in front of the house and we clambered aboard. Ten minutes later we alighted where Jack and his beaters were waiting. The latter were easily split into two categories - below and above the age for military service, nevertheless I was somewhat surprised at the number present.

As we walked to our pegs, I commented on this to our host. He laughed heartily, "Jack's a resourceful chap, he doesn't pay them cash, in stead they receive vouchers for so many rabbits and so many pigeons, usable at

any time. With the meat ration - what is it two or three ounces a week? he has no difficulty of getting all the beaters he wants."

By this time we'd reached the line of pegs and I was No 1. John Howlett pointed mine out to me on the extreme right, "I'm afraid you wont have much to do this drive, but with the wind blowing straight down the line, anything that comes your way will be worth shooting." He was right, nothing came, but I had a great view of what was happening.

The wind was now really gusting off The Solent resulting in some really high birds, which on the whole were dealt with by the other Guns in a manner that made one appreciate that cartridges were at a premium and not to be wasted. There was one exception - the General and of him least said soonest mended! The drive was obviously nearly over when I heard bang, bang away to my left, followed by another double, then another.

It was then I noticed a lone partridge flying high and fast straight down the line. By the time it reached me it was just about and only just, within shot. What the hell, up to then I hadn't dirtied a barrel. I gave it plenty of lead, pulled the trigger and saw it crumple, to fall dead about eighty yards away. John Howlett and the other guns were most



I gave it plenty of lead, pulled the trigger and saw it crumple, to fall dead about eighty yards away



Duck came nearly as fast as I could load

complimentary, the former remarking it was a pity I hadn't been the other end of the line as it could have saved fourteen cartridges!

The next drive, having moved up two, I found myself well placed for several testing birds which were all added to the bag. I had time to note that the General was not making any great impact and the way his gun (actually one John Howlett had lent him) was being waved around made me glad I had not drawn next to him. We'd had strict instructions at the start that foxes were to be shot, whether there was an MFH present or not! Ironically the first one to appear was added to the bag by the Colonel.

There was no doubt on that day I was very much 'money'

As we walked on for the third drive John Howlett told me that I should be in 'the hot seat' for the next drive. How right he was, I well remember I added fourteen to the bag. One of my great farming friends, whose main business was pigs, once described my shooting as like being in the pig trade - it was either muck or money. There was no doubt on that day I was very much 'money'.

It was just after 11.00 am that we turned a corner in a ride, whilst walking on for the fourth drive, the frost still crisp underfoot and there, just ahead, was a Ford V8 Shooting Brake. The tailboard was down, a pristine white

linen tablecloth neatly spread. Either end was a magnum of champagne and arrayed between them with regimental precision were nine cut glass half pint tankards, the butler standing at the ready to pop the corks, For a moment I wondered why nine, but then I spied Jack leaning against the side of the brake. He grinned as we approached, "That were nice to watch", then indicating me, "Particularly that young gentleman." I laughed, "I can assure you, Jack, it was even nicer to do". As I said that, the Colonel passed me a brimming tankard of champagne, "Try that. I think you'll agree, even on a bitter morning like this, it beats a hot toddy or a mug of soup." How right he was; at that moment, flushed with success, it was truly the ambrosia of the gods.

I saw the General hold out his tankard for a refill and I, also, saw the frown that crossed John Howlett's face as he brought the party to order. "Right, now listen carefully, this next drive is quite short, a fun drive to test your reflexes. Its not pegged and I will place you. You will be on a ride not more than about fifteen yards wide and only a little more between you. Surprisingly the birds are high and testing."

Minutes later I found myself as third Gun from the left and, to my horror, the General was on my right, his gun resting across the crook of his left arm, pointing straight down the line! I was not happy minutes later, thoroughly uncomfortable, I missed a woodcock as it momentarily flicked across the ride. I vaguely heard some derisory comment from the General and then a yell of "Gee, a fox."

Three pellets from the General's gun were embedded in the heel of my right boot

Never was there a truer comment than John Howlett's about testing our reflexes. The fox was less than three yards from me, its attention entirely focussed on the General whose gun was bearing down on it. Self preservation, providence, a reflex action, call it what

you will, but as the General pulled the trigger I jumped. The General missed, shooting over the fox and ploughing up the ground where I'd been standing. Even so three pellets were embedded in the heel of my right boot and one in the canvas anklet, often worn by shooters in those times.

I was too angry to be scared. I stormed across to the General and, jabbing him hard in the solar plexus, with the barrels of my gun roared at him, "If you ever do anything like that again you'll be the first bloody General of your ilk to die on active service." With that I continued, fuming, up the line to John Howlett and told him what had happened. He did not hesitate, he blew his whistle to tell Jack to hold the drive and came down to where the General stood. The Colonel had witnessed what had happened and within minutes the bogus General was on his way, the last thing being said to him by John Howlett was, "And I don't want to find you in the house when we get back."

After one more drive we again came upon the Shooting Brake and had a quick lunch alfresco - a piping hot game stew, an apple and tea. I noted no alcoholic beverage was offered. Whilst we were partaking of this John Howlett, the Colonel and Jack moved away to one side and were deep in conversation. We were told that there would be two more drives and that would be it.

In spite of my encounter with the General, during the afternoon I would still have been rated as 'money' by my pig farmer friend. We were finished and back at the house just before 3.00 pm. The bag was 162 head of game and four foxes, I forget the tally of various, but it had been a memorable day. John Howlett and the Colonel said goodnight to their guests, each of whom were given two brace of pheasants - much valued in those days.

When the other guns had gone I was asked how I felt? Slightly puzzled I replied, "Fine, I've had a fantastic day." The Colonel laughed, "Good, I just thought the near miss by the General might have shaken you. Jack thinks we



Mallard pitched in as well but some flared at the the sound of shots nearby

should shoot some of the flight ponds in the woods. He's sure that with this wind the ducks will be streaming in off The Solent and we should have half to three quarters of an hours great shooting." I laughed happily, "That sounds great, but I've only ten cartridges left." John Howlett said he'd give me a box and we'd better hurry. Further that Jack would be going with me and that he'd kept back two of the beaters, who both had dogs to go with him and the Colonel.

The light was already beginning to fade by the time we reached my butt. I was surprised how small the pond was, not more than 18 to 20 yards across, but very sheltered. Jack told me from which direction the duck were likely to come and that he'd be back in the wood behind me with his two Flatcoats, picking birds as they fell. I laughed, "If they fall." Jack as he disappeared retorted that he hadn't much fear about that. For five or six minutes nothing

happened, then duck came nearly as fast as I could load. From the banging it seemed the others were having equal sport.

After about twenty minutes or less, I called out "Jack, that's it, I've run out of cartridges". He replied, "Stay where you are, I've a few more to pick." When he joined me he told me he'd picked 19 mallard and 12 teal. Between the three of us we were just short of a hundred duck.

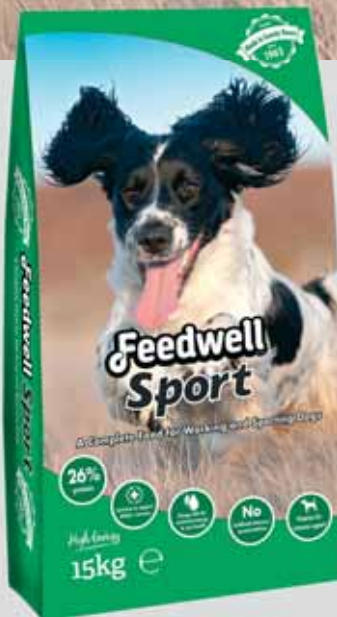
As I drove home the Colonel slept soundly beside me. Apparently the meeting had gone on until nearly 3.00 am. I tried to pick out the highlights of a fantastic day as I drove, with hooded lights, along miles of empty road. First place had to be the unlucky partridge on the first drive, but a close second came the half tankard of bubbly - I've never enjoyed champagne more and never drunk it since that I haven't thought of that frosty morning in a wood on the edge of the New Forest back in 1941.

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The Balmoral International Event

Keepers, Judges and the three teams

The chance to represent one's country is a rare honour for the pointer enthusiast. If you run spaniels and retrievers there are regular events where dogs and handlers can run for their country but there have been just three Internationals for pointer people in the past twenty-one years. All took place at Balmoral by kind permission of Her Majesty the Queen and all were organised by the Pointer Club.

Three teams have competed each time: England, Ireland and Scotland. Ireland won the first event in 2000 with England taking top spot in 2010. Originally scheduled for last summer, the third Team Event finally got under way on 16th August 2021 at Dalnadamph. Our Judges were Fiona Kirk and Meryl Asbury, Headkeeper Miichael Bennett and Beatkeeper Craig Hepburn carried the guns and David Hall was our Chief Steward.

The past two matches were run as shooting days but the general shortage of grouse this year meant that no birds would be shot, though the Guns were

asked to act as though they were shooting when it came to getting in to position at a point and firing an appropriate number of shots according to how the grouse rose.

There were four dogs in each team and they were run as competitive braces with fifteen minutes allotted to each brace. The aim was to simulate a shooting day rather than a Field Trial with the handlers in charge and the Judges simply observing – and marking each dog and handler of course. There were to be no eliminating faults so each brace would run for their full fifteen minutes regardless of the odd bumped bird, chase or missed ground though any faults would, of course, be noted and marked down by the Judges.

There were a possible sixty marks available for each dog. Ground treatment rated a maximum of twenty points; game handling fifteen points; handlers instructing the Guns five points and overall performance ten points with a possible bonus of ten points for dogs that produced an outstanding piece of work. Each dog and handler would have

two runs either side of lunch and the total number of marks would decide the places. Initially it was disappointing that we were unable to shoot any grouse, but in a way this worked in our favour as each brace was able to work for their full fifteen minutes with no breaks for retrieving.

The best pointers in Britain were strutting their stuff

The first round was run along the side of an undulating strip of ground which was wide open on the left below the beat, but quickly turning to dead ground above us for dogs that went right-handed. The views were spectacular with the heather well in bloom and clouds of yellow pollen coating our boots as we walked. If there is a better place to spend a sunny day than a heather moor in August I have yet to find it and it was pure delight to be out on the hill at Dalnadamph to watch some of the best pointers in Britain strutting their stuff.

It was a perfect day for the hill: bright and sunny with a blustery wind



Stephen Clarke's Gannochy Milo of Fauloon at Glendrisock



Michael Houston's Koram Kendal looks for instructions

that made for a cool start and difficult conditions for the first brace; Steve Lound for England with FTCh Frosted Elfin of Fleetstalk and James Coyle with Brackbawn Wanda representing Ireland. The wind kept swinging about so that at any moment it might be head on, a cheek wind or almost from behind and while some of the quartering looked a little messy it was because the dogs were adjusting to switches in wind direction.

It was hard to decide whether scent was good or bad as through the morning we saw a few grouse bumped at close quarters while others were pointed well ahead of the dog. With coveys being well scattered there was every chance for the dogs to really show their pace and stamina and Stephen Clarke's Gannochy Milo of Fauloon at Glendrisock did so in great style, covering a wide beat and pointing well out in front and holding steady until the Guns were in position.

Laurence McAlister was unable to take part so Michael Houston ran two dogs; FTCh Francie Frank and Koram Kendal. Paired with event organiser Carole Brown and her FTCh Ardclinis Emerald of Crahan, FTCh Francie Frank had a great run pointing two single birds and then a big covey that ran well ahead before getting up.

With a steady breeze from ahead, the day was a lot warmer

In his next run, matched with Wilson

Young's Morness Ace of Burncastle, Michael's Koram Kendal had much the better of it with a find on a good covey that again got up well ahead. Richard MacNicol and John Naylor ended the morning with Gerensary Pinot and FTCh Goddrib Bari of Bitternboom.

The wind had settled into a steady breeze from ahead, the day was a lot warmer and the grouse had settled down from their earlier jumpiness. John found a nice bunch of grouse that may have settled in from earlier points and was well backed by Richard's dog who went on to produce a single bird that had run down the hill.

After lunch we moved to the high ground where Headkeeper Michael Bennett correctly predicted that birds would be scarce. Far from being a disadvantage this gave the harder runners a real chance to show their paces. The wind had eased a bit and with the day getting warmer the grouse sat much better for those dogs that were lucky enough to have birds on their beat. Stephen Clarke and Gannochy Milo of Fauloon at Glendrisock covered a lot of ground again, running with Terry Harris and FtCh Koram Gemma Sparkfield in an impressive display of hard, fast quartering, but there were no birds to reward either dog.

It was the same for Michael Houston's second run with FTCh Francie Frank. Paired with Scotland's Jon Kean and Morness Archie, both dogs covered their ground well without finding birds. Michael's second runner,

Koram Kendal, pointed a hare and proceeded to entertain us with a lively course, the hare winning out in the end though it was a close-run thing. The final pairing was eighty-four-year-old James Coyle for Ireland and Richard MacNicol for Scotland with Brackbawn Wanda and Gerensary Pinot respectively. This time there were birds and a good covey for James and Brackbawn Wanda to bring the day to a very satisfactory close.

Back at headquarters, the Douneside House Hotel, the competitors, Judges, Guns and spectators gathered for a celebration dinner attended by Balmoral Factor Richard Gledson who presented the awards. England took top spot with Scotland second and Ireland third. Richard MacNicol and Gerensary Pinot were the Judges choice as Top Pointer and the Guns' Choice was Michael Houston's FTCh Francie Frank. An excellent meal was enjoyed by all thanks to some very generous sponsorship from Skinners Field and Trial dog foods.

The formal part of the evening was rounded off with Carole Brown receiving a prolonged and thoroughly deserved standing ovation for three years of planning, negotiating and hard work to ensure that the event finally went ahead. I have spent an awful lot of time on the hill over the past forty-odd years and I cannot think of a single day that I enjoyed than this one and huge thanks must go to Carole for making it such a success.

Results

Winning Team England with 291 points

Steve Lound, FTCh Frosted Elfin of Fleetstalk
Terry Harris, FTCh Koram Gemma Sparkfield
Jon Naylor, FTCh Goddrib Bari of Bitternboom
Carole Brown, FTCh Ardclinis Emerald of Crahan

Runners Up Scotland with 266 points

Richard MacNicol, Gerensary Pinot
Wilson Young, Morness Ace of Burncastle
Jon Kean, Morness Archie
Peter O'Driscoll Argameols Blaze Moss at Fowington

Third Ireland with 232 points

Michael Houston FTCh Francie Frank & Koram Kendall
James Coyle Brackbawn Wanda
Stephen Clarke Gannochy Milo of Fauloon at Glendrisock
Top Pointer Richard MacNicol Gerensary Pinot
Guns' Choice Michael Houston's FTCh Francie Frank



Stephen Clarke for Ireland casting off Gannochy Milo of Fauloon at Glendrisock.



Ready to run are Scotland's Richard MacNicol with Gerensary Pinot and James Coyle with Brackbawn Wanda representing Ireland



Guns' Choice, Michael Houston's FTCh Francie Frank on point



In third spot were Ireland: Dr Stephen Clarke, Michael Houston and James Coyle



Competitors and spectators enjoying the first morning



The Judges were Meryl Asbury and Fiona Kirk



Scotland: Wilson Young, Richard MacNicol, Jon Kean and Peter O'Driscoll were runners-up



England's winning team: Steve Lound, John Naylor, Carole Brown and Terry Harris



Balmoral Factor Richard Gledson, David Hall, Carole Brown and the Irish Team: Michael Houston, Dr Stephen Clarke and James Coyle



Guns Craig Hepburn and Michael Bennett with Ireland's Michael Houston holding Guns' Choice FTCh Francie Frank and Koram Kendal

The Pointer and Setter Champion Stake 2021

Gun Racster Dingwall and Judge Davy O'Neill watch as Richard MacNicol and winning dog Laurent Hild's Pointer FTCh Langwell Kerry of Morness work out a point.

The Pointer and Setter Champion Stake for 2021 was back on Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum's beautiful Bollihope Moor after being cancelled in 2020 because of the Covid outbreak. The qualification limits had been extended as no trials were held in England or Scotland during 2020 nor the spring of 2021 so all the runners from 2019 were eligible plus a couple who have qualified this summer.

There were thirty-six runners and Ireland was well represented with Bill Connolly, Carol Calvert, Colin Forde and Gerry Devine having ten entrants between them and Davy O'Neill judging along with Wilson Young and Colin Organ. Sheila Steeds was Chief Steward, Peter Fawcett the Steward of the Beat and the guns were carried by Bollihope keepers Racster Dingwall and Jared Bower.

It was a relief to be met by a cool, breezy morning after the heat wave where dry conditions, high pressure and



Colin Forde's Irish setter FTCh Bownard Delegator stretching out

little breeze had made our summer grouse counts difficult. Grouse numbers

in the north of England are poor this year, possibly because of a cold spring



Richard MacNicol and winning dog Laurent Hild's Pointer FTCh Langwell Kerry of Morness come forward with Gerry Devine and English setter FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie who got a Diploma of Merit.

resulting in a lack of insect food for the chicks, and Bollihope is no exception. Usually one of the most prolific moors in the country, in 2021 grouse were thin on the ground indeed. It is though, an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and

precisely because of the scarcity of grouse the 2021 Champion Stake was probably – no, make that definitely – the best I have seen in over forty years of spectating, photographing and reporting.

If you set out to design a moor that would be ideal for pointer and setter trials, then Bollihope would be what you would come up with. The ground is superbly managed with the perfect mix of short and long heather. There are



English setters Gerry Devine's FTCh Ballyellen Tango and Carol Calvert's Ballyellen Blue Grass casting off.

wide, flat areas that allow the dogs to get out and really cover some ground while still being in sight of handlers, judges and spectators and with relatively low numbers of grouse scent was clean and every brace had the chance to impress the judges with their pace, style and ground treatment. It took hard work to find grouse and good bird sense to produce them as birds were inclined to run and at times were quite jumpy but generally the dogs rose to the task.

Colin Forde got the trial under way, running his Irish setter FTCh Bownard Delegator with Nicky Harris and her Gordon setter Clitters Ailla. Some very fast and wide quartering promised much for Colin but a grouse flushed out on the flank ended his chances. Gerry Devine had five runners, all English setters, but was soon down to four when a grouse got up behind where Gortinreagh Jack Duggan was pointing birds.

Gerry had better luck with FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie, drawn against the eventual winner, Richard MacNicol handling Laurent Hild's Pointer Langwell Kerry of Morness. Both dogs were covering the ground in great style but it was the pointer who cut ahead and produced a decent covey. Gerry's FTCh Ballyellen Tango was drawn with Carol Calvert's English setter Ballyellen Blue Grass but both were quickly gone when birds were flushed. Bill Connolly booked a place in the second round with Irish setter Sheantullagh Djouse but his other runner, Sheantullagh Cormac was gone after flushing a bird in the last brace of the first day.

The second round

Eight brace survived to make the second round, Gerry Devine's English setters FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie and Ballyellen Duke joining Bill Connolly and his Irish setter Sheantullagh Djouse to fly the flag for Ireland. There was a strong breeze cutting across the heather and scent appeared to be good, though it was clear for the second day that the grouse were liable to run when pointed rather than sit tightly. First Steve



Gerry Devine's English setter FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie on the move



Fiona Kirk's English setter Upperwood Allez Allez of Woundales ran well with no luck

Lound's Pointer, FTCh Frosted Elfin at Fleetstalk, who won in 2018, had a long and ultimately non-productive rode, then Maria Jacques' Pointer FTCh Koram Mick did the same, the covey only rising after she had been asked to pick up with a single bird getting up behind the dog to end her trial.

Gerry's Ballyellen Duke had a point on a recently killed grouse, then stylishly produced three live ones, though his brace mate Terry Harris with Pointer Sparkfield Twiggy was eliminated after Twiggy got too close to a big covey and saw them flush. A couple of non-productive points ended



The Judges were Colin Organ, Wilson Young and Davy O'Neill

proceedings for Bill Connolly and Sheantullagh Djouse while Gerry Devine and FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie ran clear for a place in the third round.

All eight quartering fast and wide in a great display of pointer and setter work

Four brace were called back and given plenty of latitude on a stretch of heather bounded by a hill road

on the right and a deep gulley on the left. Judge Davy O'Neill was well out on the wing to keep an eye on the dogs if they dropped into the dead ground but despite some really hard running all the dogs stuck to their allotted beat.

Nerves must have been jangling among the handlers but the dogs took on the beat with gusto, all eight quartering fast and wide in a great display of pointer and setter work at its finest. Fiona Kirk and her English setter Upperwood Allez Allez of Woundales had been impressive right through the trial with some great quartering but had never had the luck to find a bird on her



Gerry Devine's English setter FTCh Gortinreagh Faith at full stretch



Gerry Devine and third placed English setter Ballyellen Duke waiting to run.



The winners: Richard MacNicol with Laurent Hild's Pointer FTCh Langwell Kerry of Morness.

beat. The judges gave her a good long run but in the end a missed bird saw her out while the other seven all survived to make it through to the awards.

Richard MacNicol took the top honours for the sixth time, handling Laurent Hild's Pointer FTCh Langwell Kerry of Morness with Steve Robinson the runner-up with his Irish setter Shanrycon Diamante. Gerry Devine was third with English setter Ballyellen Duke and Ann Jacques' Pointer Sparkfield Dusk was fourth. There were Diplomas of Merit for Sarah Chichester's Irish setter bitch Dunroon Ginger Storm of Wiscombe, Steve Lound's Pointer dog FTCh Frosted Elfin at Fleetstalk and Gerry Devine's English setter bitch FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie. Richard also took the Gun's Choice award: a walking stick beautifully crafted by Sep Fawcett.

In his summing up after the trial, Judge Colin Organ said that it was

probably the best Champion Stake he could remember: a sentiment that was echoed by both Davy O'Neill and Wilson Young. The weather was perfect, the ground ideal and almost without exception the dogs got out and worked their beat in true pointer and setter style. As always, Peter Fawcett and his team, together with their families gave us a great welcome and did everything in their power to ensure that the trial went smoothly and successfully.

Summary

Date: 28th & 29th July 2021
Venue: Bollihope Moor by
Permission of Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum

Judges: Colin Organ, Wilson Young and Davy O'Neill

Chief Steward: Sheila Steeds
Entries: 36 (17 Dogs & 19 Bitches)

Pointers: 14

Irish Setters: 8

English Setters: 9

Gordon Setters: 5

Head Keeper: Peter Fawcett

Guns: Racster Dingwall & Jared Bower

Winner: Laurent Hild's Pointer bitch FTCh Langwell Kerry of Morness handled by Richard MacNicol

Second: Steve Robinson's Irish setter bitch Shanrycon Diamante.

Third: Gerry Devine's English setter dog Ballyellen Duke.

Fourth: Ann Jacques' Pointer bitch Sparkfield Dusk.

Diploma of Merit Sarah Chichester's Irish setter bitch Dunroon Ginger Storm of Wiscombe.

Gerry Devine's English setter bitch FTCh Gortinreagh Eppie.

Steve Lound's Pointer dog FTCh Frosted Elfin at Fleetstalk.

Keepers' Choice Laurent Hild's Pointer bitch FTCh Langwell Kerry of Morness handled by Richard MacNicol

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