

Irish

# COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE

ON SALE TO  
11th November 2020

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A New Season Dawns & The Virtual Game Fair Launches

# The Irish Game Fair & Fine Food Festival

WHERE TOWN & COUNTRY MEET



## Shanes Castle, Antrim 26th & 27th June 2021



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**Front Cover:**

Mary Murray's Chesapeake Retriever  
Uisce at the Hill of Tara.

Photograph by Mary Murray

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## Country Sports and Country Life

### Rol Comment

It's been a very hard number of months for everybody. In the hunting community we had the activities we love so much taken away from us. For many of us our field sport of choice is one of the highlights of our lives, and to have that source of pleasure removed was a big wrench.

Anglers in the south were more fortunate than anglers in the north because we were entitled to fish within five kilometres of our home, whereas in the north they couldn't fish at all for a period of time. After June 8th the distance in the south was increased to twenty kilometres. But during the first phase of the Lockdown we couldn't go more than two kilometres from our house which meant that most of us had to forego the pleasure of an angle, unless we were fortunate enough to have a river flowing near our house! After June 29th we could travel anywhere in the country. When finally the lockdown eased a bit more on the 8th of June I headed into the great outdoors with my fishing rod, accompanied by a couple of friends.

It had been a frustrating few months not being able to enjoy a bit of fishing or mink hunting and it was fantastic to at long last be let off the leash. I agree with the writer who said that freedom is our true nature, and for most of us the feeling of having one's freedoms curtailed is very unpleasant.

I headed out to a friend's lake on his farm, which is located in south Offaly, a short distance from me. This is a great little lake which we stock each year with trout and which is full of roach. I am going to keep its whereabouts unknown and the name of its owner anonymous because I don't want poachers coming around stealing our trout in the middle of the night and detracting from our sport.

My brother-in-law and his son accompanied me once again to the lake. The last time we had fished it together we had all drawn a blank. I was disappointed at the time for my ten year old nephew. He loves fishing, had been out several times but hadn't caught anything yet. That was to change on this particular evening. With the wind blowing strongly in the broadleaf trees surrounding the waters of the lake, he put a worm on the hook of his eight foot rod, held the line in his right hand, unclasped the spinner guard and cast the bait out into the dark, opaque water. Meanwhile we busied ourselves with our own rods and bait. I tried a cast but the bait got caught in the low, overhanging branches. Damn. Unfortunately there are a lot of lowhanging branches at the lakeshore, so it's easy to get your line entangled. As I sought to untangle the line, there was a cry of joy - my nephew had caught something within just a few minutes. It was a small roach, with its attractive red eyes and red

fins. It was the first of several roach which my nephew would catch during the evening. He was delighted.

My farmer-friend and myself left my brother-in-law and my nephew at it and we found a spot for ourselves on the far side of the lake. Soon the roach were biting. We caught eight in all. They were feeding aggressively, obviously very hungry. The bait was no sooner in the water than they were upon it. The worms worked best. Sometimes we tried sweetcorn as bait but they managed to nibble these off without being hooked.

We'd stocked the lake with one to two pound trout. These were less frequent than the roach but their arrival was more dramatic, breaking the surface of the water and causing a splash. Then, when they bit on the bait, the rod would bend considerably and it was an exciting tussle until we got them beside the shore and swooped them up in the net. Three trout were bagged, all fantastic fish.

When I got home I barbecued the eight roach and three trout. Barbecuing roach is a popular thing in eastern Europe. After we had tried it I could see why. They were delicious. After treating them with olive oil, rosemary, cumin, salt, pepper, mint and lemon, we placed the fish between two tightly sealed layers of tin foil and put them over the BBQ for 15 minutes. We ate them with potato wedges (which had been treated in oil, paprika and chilli powder and cooked in the oven) and with broccoli. A superb meal.

In July I drove to north Cork to meet my old friends in the fantastic minkhunting pack which hunts every Sunday in that part of the world. We met by a long-disused, rusting creamery in remote country beside the River Allow. We smiled and chatted, but didn't shake hands, and related our Covid experiences to each other. One comment was made again and again - it was a hallelujah moment for everyone when the restrictions were finally lifted and they could once again tread the river banks in search of that pest, the imported American mink.

In my humble opinion, mink hunting is related to fishing because you are in a similar environment, enjoying the tranquillity and loveliness of that environment. Spending a summer's day walking a river bank, sometimes walking on the riverbed, the water up to your waist, in the company of twenty or thirty dogs, is a great way to pass a day. One of the people in the Cork pack is a priest and he said to me it was a very positive thing to be doing on a Sunday. People have been hunting with packs of hounds in riverside settings for centuries. When I'm out with the mink pack I can feel that sense of tradition. There's tradition, good exercise and

beauty. These qualities, because of their positive nature, are a far cry from the negative world of Covid 19.

The River Allow's name comes from the Irish "Abhainn Ealla", which means Swan River. It rises in the Mullaghareirk hills (which are also known as Sliabh Luachra). Sliabh Luachra is located on the borders of Cork, Kerry and Limerick. The Allow is a salmon fishery and it forms part of the Limerick / Cork border. It's about 25 miles in length. You can often walk safely on its riverbed, so it's a good river to hunt. The terrain beside it can be wet, muddy and testing, so a taxing workout is in store! The huntsman told me that the previous hunts had been good with the hounds enjoying excellent scent. Sure enough, when I joined them, within a few minutes the hounds opened and their music filled the wooded river valley. We hunted the same mink up and down the same short stretch of the river for an hour and a half, but we couldn't catch up with him and after a while decided to give him best and try further along the river. We wondered how he could have escaped the hounds. The general feeling was that, during a period when the hounds had briefly lost his scent, he had gone into a place under the bank that was sufficiently far enough away from the river to make picking up the scent again an impossibility. After five hours the huntsman blew for home and we returned to our cars.

Amid all the doom and gloom swirling around everyone these days, positive bits of news are very welcome. I was delighted to hear recently that the Great Game Fairs of Ireland will be returning to the Republic. The Great Game Fairs ran a Game Fair in BIRR Castle for several years which was a hugely popular event. Many people expressed their disappointment to me when they learned that there would be no more Fairs in BIRR after 2017. Now Albert, Irene and Steven are bringing the Fair back to the midlands on the 28th and 29th of August 2021. They can't go public yet with the probable venue. Sadly it won't be BIRR but I think it's a venue which many people will be happy with. So then, here's to the end of Covid-19, the return of normality, and the return of fantastic, sociable events like the Irish Game Fair!

We are also going to see something never seen before - a Virtual Game Fair. It will begin at the end of August and run continuously until the Shanes Castle event in June. Just like the traditional game fair, The Virtual Game Fair has special areas for hunting, shooting fishing, conservation and so much more.

Simply click on [www.thevirtualgamefair.com](http://www.thevirtualgamefair.com) to find out what's in store.

**Derek Fanning, ROI Editor**



First and foremost I would like to express the sympathy of everyone here at the magazine to anyone who has been affected personally or otherwise by the Covid 19 pandemic, especially those who have suffered loss.

The effects have been unprecedented for us all. However, we are now trying to adapt to what might well become the 'new normal.'

And that goes for everyone involved in country sports. Some changes were easy to see coming as the pandemic tightened its grip and governments tried to take positive action for the country's health. Many large scale events were affected including our own Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle.

Everything was done to try to ensure the 2020 Fair could take place within a safe environment.

First of all, we postponed the event until the 29th & 30th August. We also put together a new layout and an innovative Covid compliant health & safety plan. We continuously monitored the Covid 19 pandemic and the most recent ongoing government advice.

Representations were made at the highest level, to see if there was any way that we could make the event happen in a fashion that was consistent with the prevailing government guidelines and in a fashion which protected all involved. Unfortunately this has not been possible to achieve.

Nevertheless, pandemics notwithstanding, the Shanes Castle Game Fair will take place next year on 26th & 27th June 2021.

But despite that disappointment, the team's forward thinking and planning has resulted in progressing the concept of a VIRTUAL GAME FAIR. The range and focus of this event is quite unique and although based in Ireland, it has a worldwide focus for traders, competitors and visitors who have missed fairs in their own regions and countries..

We always said that the Game Fair was for everyone - now it really is. You don't even need to leave your home to visit it. And you can go there again and again, free of charge any time you like.

You can get direct web links from this 'one stop' Virtual Game Fair to all the normal Rows and Pavilions of the normal game fair with special offers and bargains including in our very aptly named 'Bargain Basement' area. Plus virtual and live competitions and attractions, updated news and a country sports forum. Tell us what's missing and we'll do our best to add it!

And while I'm on the subject of adding things, more trade stands, more equipment and more of everything will be added every

day as the Virtual Game Fair really takes off. Already we have GB & ROI traders and organisations on board, but I think we can expect this base to go worldwide very quickly indeed.

The traditional game fair will continue to run each year in the glorious countryside - while the Virtual Game Fair, will run all year round, each day, every day. And just like a traditional Game Fair, The Virtual Game Fair has special areas for hunting, shooting fishing, conservation and so much more and will be a joy to visit from the comfort of your armchair.

Now here's the thing: unlike a static game fair whose entertainment, trade stands and the general public are restricted both to its location and to the two days during which it operates THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR will run 24/7 right through 2020 and 2021.

No tickets, no queuing. You're only a click away from the Virtual Game Fair! Where the weather's always just what you want it to be!

As one of our prominent MPs, himself an ardent country sports enthusiast and conservationist, said: 'we have a wonderful sport, we should and must let others know.' We think the VIRTUAL GAME FAIR provides us with an opportunity to do that over the next months.

It will let visitors from all around the world know that we love our country sports and its activities and everything that is associated with it - and it extends our longstanding Game Fair tradition that we welcome everyone. Now that welcome extends worldwide 24 hours a day 365 days per year.

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland team brought you the very first game fair in Ireland. Now we bring you THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR at [www.thevirtualgamefair.com](http://www.thevirtualgamefair.com)

We expect to see great things happen with this brand new concept. Be in at the start, enjoy it from the word go, use its resources and if you are a trader it really is worth investigating right now.

On a different topic, we congratulate BASC on launching a legal 'Fighting Fund' with the objective of making a significant contribution to promoting and protecting sustainable shooting and conservation in the UK and in particular fighting the threats posed to shooting and land usage by Wild Justice.

The seven-figure fund will hold ring-fenced reserves that will enable the association to push forward with proactive legal initiatives to secure the future of shooting. In addition, it will enable BASC to launch an effective defence to disruptive legal

challenges that could negatively impact our community.

In a press release, BASC chairman Eoghan Cameron said: "The fund, the first of its kind, will set BASC on a new path to promoting and protecting shooting, our community and the countryside. This fund will allow us to further our aims and lead from the front when presented with opportunities and when facing down legal challenges. We are already fighting legal cases in England and Wales and there are other potential cases in the wings. For shooting to be heard and represented effectively in court, it must have an ability to fund legal action. Thanks to the generosity of our members and sound financial management, BASC has the means to do so."

Wild Justice's Mark Avery remarked on the 7-figure Fighting Fund for proactive legal initiatives to secure the future of shooting by writing, 'Quite what this will do for BASC's membership is difficult to see - they will have to decide whether their membership subscriptions are being well spent.'

Although Wild Justice is effectively an organisation of just three individuals working part-time, they have posed one the greatest ever threats to shooting and related conservation through their creative and forensic use of the law and their ability to utilize crowd funding to finance a series of challenges.

While the sporting organisations were facing dissent in the ranks due to their stance on lead shot, Wild Justice were engaged in legal guerilla action on restricting and even stopping shooting from vermin control to grouse shooting.

If ever concerted and effective action was needed by the organisations, it is NOW.

So we welcome BASC's initiative to establish this fighting fund. However, it really needs to be pro-active in order to win over the government's and public's hearts and minds as well as defeat unwelcome and legal attacks on country sports. Along with that, I think it needs a brand new focussed, fit for purpose media strategy to underpin its activities and a media team capable of implementing it effectively. A small part-time organization like Wild Justice must no longer be allowed to set the agenda on the future of our sport.

I will watch the Fighting Fund's deployment with interest and hopefully applaud many victories. I hope that this new Fighting Fund gets great results, especially when the opposition are allegedly reliant on crowd funding.

**Paul Pringle, Northern Editor**

# Swarovski Optik

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**F**ounded in 1949 in Absam, Tyrol, SWAROVSKI OPTIK specializes in the development and manufacturing of long-range optical instruments of the highest precision. The binoculars, spotting scopes, rifle scopes, and optronic instruments are products of choice for demanding users. Since more than 70 years, SWAROVSKI OPTIK stands for highest quality standards, ground breaking innovations and respect for nature. The appreciation of and care for nature is an essential part of their philosophy.

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The Z8i riflescope completely redefines performance with its 8x zoom and outstanding optics. Its optimum detail recognition is impressive, based on high magnification, uncompromising image definition across the whole field of view, and exceptional viewing comfort facilitating rapid target acquisition.



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## Jim Dalton and Irish Lurcher & Terrier Group raise money to purchase PPE for Cork Hospice

**T**he Great Game Fairs of Ireland have supported a few initiatives through the 'lockdown' including some to simply entertain, some for charity and some for purchasing PPE for our frontline staff.

We were delighted to support Jim Dalton's ballot to raise funds for PPE for the Marymount Hospice, Co Cork. The winner of the ballot was Cormac McParlin, from Dublin, who won £50, a year's subscription to Irish Country Sports and Country Life and Game Fair tickets plus a huge array of terrier & lurcher leatherwear from the Dublin Leather Company.

Jim posted this 'thank you note' on Facebook

"Signed -sealed and delivered ! .... We got a most beautiful welcome and thank you from the Marymount staff today on arrival , our contribution was very much needed and appreciated. Happy faces all round , so one more time "Irish Lurcher and Terrier," I would like to thank each and every member along with non - members who jumped on board to help us achieve our fundraising goal for the great frontliners. Once again a huge thanks to Albert Titterington, the Great Game Fairs of Ireland and the Dublin Leather Store for their fantastic contributions and donations



which were hugely appreciated. Again thanks so much to you all , without your decency and respected input - this was not possible ...well done again ...respect to you"



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# National Association of Regional Game Councils



## **Biodiversity**

**W**ell folks, autumn is on our doorstep. Thoughts turn to predawn duck and the tail end of the fishing season. Perhaps you have been doing some crop protection with pigeon and corvid control over the summer months.

Back in May, pigeon shooting in the summer months looked like a goner. Minister Madigan and her scientific advisers in the NPWS decided that pigeons were no problem in June, July and August and banned shooting for those months. Looking back to the NPWS commissioned study on the operation of the bird's directive and the Irish derogation it was clear that no recommendation to exclude the summer months from pigeon control was contained therein. What I did see was a submission from Birdwatch Ireland trying to class this mainly sedentary bird as a migrant (you can guess why) and then looking for a closed period when the pigeon could not be shot.

We with the support of the farming lobby and other sports organisations won the day. Do not think that the war is over as they will be back!

Science plays no part in this rush to protect pigeons. Sentiment and appeasement of the "Bird lobby to the NPWS" is closer to the reality here.

Sadly, listening to a recent discussion on national radio on the need to cull predators to protect endangered bird species here in Ireland I couldn't help but come to the conclusion that despite serious failures in sponsored breeding programs for upland species such as Curlew they have learned very little.

I listened with growing incredulity as they poured out their hearts on the pain they felt at having to take the life of any creature. One contributor lamented the fact that the fox had no protection and could be shot any time. Killing crows and magpies could only be as a last resort when all other deterrents had failed.

Of course we humankind are to blame. We have allowed through our land usage that predators have the upper hand over prey species and have eliminated large carnivores such as wolves that would keep lesser predators in check. It is a very short step from this position to re-wilding and the reintroduction of wolves. Now where have we heard this stuff before? With the Greens

in power sharing and with FF and FG competing to display their green potential anything is likely to come on the agenda.

There was not a mention in this discussion of our friend the American mink. It may be too close to home for our eco-warriors to admit that the plague of an alpha predator unleashed into our rivers and waterways system was at the hands of their well-meaning supporters who deplored that the poor little minks were killed for the fur trade.

In the late 1980s and early 90s and even more recently in Donegal the direct action brigade were responsible for breaking into fur farms and releasing the mink into the wild.

This now feral species has colonised the entire country in just a half a century. The havoc mink have raged on our indigenous wildlife is almost incalculable. The NPWS is tasked with implementing programs to eradicate this invasive species.

An honourable mention here to Dublin RGC and the Liffey Mink Eradication group. They are hugely active in their task keeping me up to speed on their WhatsApp page. Keep up the good work you and all the fishing and Gun clubs nationwide that strive to keep this scourge away. This predator now numbering some fifty thousand represents a significant threat to our fish

stocks, our waterfowl and our upland ground nesting birds.

I will mention also the NARGC initiative to re-establish the native Grey Partridge. These satellite programmes with proper vermin control are achieving considerable success. I intend to carry an interview with Jim Brennan along with pictures in the next issue so readers can get a feel for a real conservation project.

The NARGC is always ready to co-operate with all Conservation bodies and projects, offering our knowledge and experience in the cause of protecting the environment and biodiversity.

## **Clay clubs and NARGC membership**

We have been delighted to welcome a number of Clay clubs into the NARGC family. As Clubs that were previously covered by Country Side Alliance (Ireland) come to the end of their cover period we welcome enquiries to join the NARGC. Just contact our Fund administrator for the lowdown on what we have to offer. You will be pleasantly surprised and we will facilitate your affiliation to our Club/County structure.

Good shooting and continued good health to you all.

**John Toal (National PRO) NARGC**



*Charity shoot with Kieran Finn, Dan Curley, John Toal and P. J. Rosney last year before social distancing.*



# 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.

The Association welcomes the affiliation of new Clubs through its RGC structure.



### In addition, with the NARGC you have:

- Full-time staff dedicated to working for shooting interests
- A say in the running of the Association - elections/resolutions
- A Members' Magazine posted free to your home at least once annually
- Habitat and other Grants for your Club - €350,000 granted annually
- Special Funding for Grouse Projects
- Grants for the purchase of Predator Control equipment by Clubs
- Mallard/Pheasant Release subsidies for Clubs and RGC's - currently €4.37 per bird
- Research into Game and other species
- Club of the Year Award

- Game Meat Handling Courses
- Representation otherwise at EU level
- A good working relationship with Farmers
- An Association Shop - books, badges, stickers, ties etc
- Monitoring and input into the drafting of legislation affecting shooting sports
- Inter-Club & Inter-County Annual Clay Shoots - biggest Clay Shoot in Ireland
- Members' access to information/advise on all issues every day
- Proficiency Courses and Safety Seminars for Associate Members
- Constant Government lobbying in Ireland and at EU level

We now offer Fund Membership to Club Members who are under 14 for just €10

For information on the Compensation Fund, call our Fund Office on FREEPHONE: 1800 222 444 or telephone our full-time National Fund Administrator on 086 788 8411 (office hours only please)



## 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  
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# Countryside Alliance



As all of our members and politicians know Countryside Alliance Ireland continues to be a leading rural campaigning organisation.

Our ability to campaign for the countryside, country sports and the rural way of life is unrivalled in many circles and our campaigning efforts continue to be at the forefront of everything we do.

During the lockdown period we did not sit idle. We submitted a return to shooting document to the NI Executive outlining the reasons shooting and country sports should be included in the first steps to normality and we welcomed the response from the First Ministers Office confirming shooting would be included in phase 1 of the recovery plan.

In the Republic of Ireland, we submitted a robust response to Minister Madigan decision to stop the control of pigeons for crop protection during the summer without consultation. CAI along with other stakeholders challenged the Minister resulting in her decision to reverse the restrictions.

While we don't know how "unlocking" the country will continue, Countryside Alliance Ireland believes that we must all approach the start of the 2020/21 season with a degree of optimism. There is still a long way to go until normality returns in terms of our health, schools, businesses, sport, travel and socialising in general but we all need something to look forward to and to be ready when that time comes.

## Saboteurs

While saboteur numbers in Ireland remain fairly low, they do remain very active and we must not underestimate their ability not only to disrupt a day's hunting or shooting but also our social events, for example, one activist group calling for a protest at a Lisburn hotel to stop a Hunt Dinner Dance last year.

Acts of civil trespass are a matter for landowners, but if saboteurs are interrupting a legal activity on private property, they are committing the criminal offence of aggravated trespass. In the event, it may prove possible to bring trespass action and apply for injunctions against identifiable individuals, and possibly groups. If a criminal offence is being committed, it is therefore important to inform the police so they can then take the necessary action.

Any criminal allegation will need to be corroborated with film footage if it is to meet the necessary threshold for a criminal prosecution. Criminal offences being carried out by saboteurs should therefore be filmed, and it is important that saboteurs are ordered by the police to remove face coverings so that they can be identified at a later date.

The Countryside Alliance's guidance sheet 'Saboteurs and Shooting' raises awareness of the risks of saboteurs and provides advice on how best to deal with them.

## Countryside Clean up

The Countryside Alliance is delighted to announce that the annual Countryside Clean-up has been rescheduled to take place on 19th - 20th September 2020 following earlier postponement due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

With the long period of lockdown offering people the opportunity to have a clear-out, fly-tipping and littering in the countryside became one of the many negative side-effects of the pandemic, particularly when local waste recycling centres were shut.

Taking part is a fantastic opportunity for those who partake in country sports either as an individual or as a club to demonstrate our conservation value and helps strengthen relationships between landowners, the public and political representatives.

Not only is discarded litter an eyesore, it is bad for the environment and is also potentially hazardous to farmed



livestock, wild animals, game and domestic pets. We all have great respect for the countryside, and this is just a small way in which we can demonstrate how important it is for us to ensure that it remains a wonderful place to live and visit.

After the event, we would love to see any photographs or videos taken of your volunteers hard at work, or standing alongside any bags of refuse that have been accumulated as well as to receive details about how many people took part in your litter pick. You can send all of this information over to us at [policy@countryside-alliance.org](mailto:policy@countryside-alliance.org) additionally please post your photos on social media or contact local press who may cover the story.



Take simple safety precautions.

## Safety in the Hide

Whether pigeon or duck shooting we have all at times seen many Guns shooting in a single hide, all with their guns loaded and firing simultaneously. But if you intend to invite a friend to shoot with you, we would ask shooters to consider the following advice whilst shooting in a hide. Please only use one gun at any one time and take steps to reduce each shooters arc of fire.

This could be as simple as shooting from separate hides or using a raised hide pole, stopping one gun shooting over the other, which is exactly what happened to this two-week-old firearm. Taking these simple steps will not only make the sport safer but is also far more sporting and productive.



An almost new gun was ruined.

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# Countrysports Ireland

## Restrictions on Wood Pigeon Shooting Reversed

Law making in relation to the shooting of wood pigeon in the Republic of Ireland descended into farce earlier this year. In early May news broke that Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Josepha Madigan had signed into law regulations that prohibited the shooting of wood pigeon during the months of June, July and August without any prior notice of her intention or indeed consultation with stakeholders.

Laws relating to the shooting of pest birds are made by way of annual declaration which means that they can be changed relatively quickly and without normal legislative scrutiny.

Within days and following substantial lobbying on the matter these proposals were reversed and the long established



derogation which permits the shooting of wood pigeon for crop protection during June, July and August was reinstated

Country Sports Ireland would like to thank our many members and indeed other organisations and their members who contacted the Minister, their local TDs or in any way supported our work to have this attack on shooting sports overturned.

## Deer Research in Collaboration with Queens University Belfast

Research undertaken by Queens University Belfast has indicated that fallow, sika and red deer across Ireland are healthy condition and that muntjac sightings are occurring in new areas. The aim of QUB research in collaboration with Country Sports Ireland has been to develop a method for assessing and predicting the transmission of parasites between livestock and deer. The likelihood of this transmission depends on deer behaviour, the impact of climate on parasite development, landscape parameters and other factors.

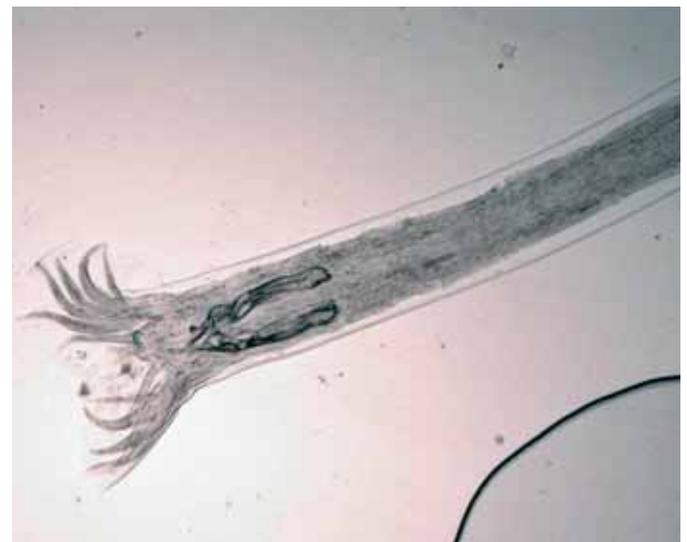
QUB have acknowledged the importance of the knowledge of the hunting community in gaining deer and parasite information. With over 40% of respondents hunting for more than 10 years and 73% of respondents undertaking training that included lessons on deer health, the importance of hunters in science is clearer now than ever.

Feedback from the hunting community has also shown that ticks and liver fluke are the most common parasite found in deer here and some pilot post mortem work at QUB indicates that deer contain gutworms which are more typically associated with sheep and cows.

There are plans for both organisations to continue to collaborate on other deer research projects and the continued support of the hunting community via questionnaires and collection of samples will be very important.



The shooting of wood pigeon is important for crop protection during June, July and August



A gutworm found in fallow deer at Tollymore Forest Park Co. Down.

## Quality Training Delivered

At the beginning of July relaxation of some of the Covid-19 regulations meant that the Country Sports Ireland team were able to recommence delivery of our leading country sports training courses. During a very busy July & August period we delivered 3 Deer Stalking Training Courses and 2 Trained Hunter - Large Wild Game meat hygiene courses in counties Offaly, Sligo and Cork.

We were particularly pleased to have been joined on 25th July, in Kilbehenny, Co. Cork by representatives from the Food Safety

Authority of Ireland and also the Local Authority Veterinary Service who were extremely complimentary about the Country Sports Ireland Trained Hunter Large Wild Game meat hygiene course.

Thanks as always to the regular Country Sports Ireland delivery team and the growing team of extremely capable volunteers who play an important role in helping us deliver high quality, learner friendly training events. We are also grateful for the enthusiastic participation and fantastic feedback for learners who attended the above events and also for their full compliance with any Covid-19 public health measures which helped ensure a safe learning environment for everyone.

Details on future training events are available via the training section of the website [www.countrysportsireland.org](http://www.countrysportsireland.org)

Country Sports Ireland has launched a unique new online training resource which is provided FREE of charge to all learners who book on our Deer Stalking Training Course and our Trained Hunter Large Wild Game (Deer) game meat hygiene courses. Online training manuals provide detailed tutorials, images, videos and multiple-choice written self-assessments conveniently broken down into easy to understand and 'learner friendly' sections. There is no doubt that this is a significant addition to the quality of training provided by Country Sports Ireland and a significant aid to learners attending Country Sports Ireland's leading training events.

A very brief sample of Country Sports Ireland's unique new online training platform, can be viewed via the 'Online Training' section of the Country Sports Ireland website - link below: <https://countrysportsireland.org/online0620.php>

## Game Fair Disappointment

Finally, like many others in our local country sports community,



Complying with Covid-19 regulations during the practical demonstration at the Country Sports Ireland Trained Hunter Large Wild Game meat hygiene course on 25th July, hosted by Premier Game Ltd.

Country Sports Ireland was disappointed to learn that that the Shanes Castle Game Fair has been postponed until 2021. Despite the best efforts of event organisers the 2020 Game Fair had become another casualty of Covid-19 regulations and in particular the uncertainty surrounding large public events.

However, every cloud has a silver lining and we commend Game Fair organisers for their 'Virtual Game Fair' initiative – details of which are available elsewhere in this publication. Country Sports Ireland will be supporting the 'virtual game fair' and doing whatever we can to support the event through what are challenging times for all of us.

Look out for a very special Country Sports Ireland Membership Offer when the VIRTUAL GAME FAIR 2020 opens for business at [www.thevirtualgamefair.com](http://www.thevirtualgamefair.com) on the 29th & 30th August 2020.

## Stylish and Practical - Barbour's New Countrywear Collection is Full of Wardrobe Essentials



Barbour Brockstone Jacket RRP L249, Barbour Dennis Thermo Shirt RRP 69.95, Barbour Tattersal Lambswool Scarf RR P L26.95 available at [barbour.com](http://barbour.com)



**A**utumnal walks in the countryside inspire this season's Barbour Countrywear collection. Featuring a range of shirts and t-shirts ideal for layering under timeless and practical knitwear styles, they're wardrobe essentials as the weather turns colder.

Outerwear sees new textured quilts for men with popular utility and parka wax cotton styles for women. Functional waterproof breathable styles, perfect for rainy days rounds off a stylish and functional country collection.

Seasonal colours of golden yellow, winter pearl and claret for womenswear clothing features throughout the collection with intricate and beautiful hand-drawn print motif sketches of wildlife scenes on shirts and dresses, highlights a bucolic feel to the range.

The collection also includes signature wax cotton styles designed for longevity in earthy shades of olive and sand alongside natural berry reds tones in men's shirts presenting a quintessential Barbour range which reinforces the brand's heritage and country influence.

For further information, please visit [barbour.com](http://barbour.com)



Barbour Montgomery Wax RRP L239, Barbour Tack Fedora RRP L64.95 available at [Barbour.com](http://barbour.com)



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# VGF The Virtual Game Fair

Organised in association with  
the Irish Country Sports & Country Life magazine  
& the Great Game Fairs of Ireland

HOME THE FAIR EXHIBITORS ▾ COMPETITIONS COUNTRY NEWS TOURISM IRISH GAME FAIR COUNTRY SPORTS MAGAZINE BARGAIN BASEMENT CONTACT



## THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR

The Game Fair you can visit Every Day

CELEBRATING COUNTRY SPORTS, LIVING AND CONSERVATION FOR OVER FOUR DECADES

# THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR IS HERE!

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland team have quite uniquely organised 66 Game Fairs in a unbroken run over 40 years and have been continuously publishing the Irish Country Sports & Country Life magazine for over 30 years. It has been recognised by customers that the long-term success of the brand has been down to impeccable planning, innovative marketing and the team's enthusiastic commitment to delivering for their customers be they traders, sponsors or visitors. Before Covid 19 struck the team had been looking forward to their

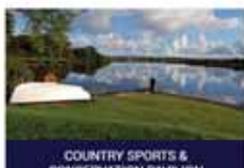
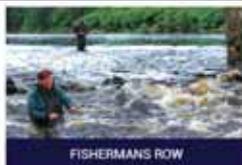
most successful year ever. Having initially postponed the Irish Game Fair, at Shanes Castle from the end of June to the 29/30 August 2020 complete with site re-design and Covid compliant plans, the organisers also put in place and test marketed plans for a VIRTUAL GAME FAIR.

When the organisers had to take the difficult decision to postpone the Shanes Castle Fair to the 26/27 June 2021, implementation of the plans for the VIRTUAL FAIR were stepped up in order to 'go live' on the 29/30 August 2020. The VIRTUAL

GAME FAIR will run right through the live fair in June 2021 (and beyond), complete with a good range of exhibitors organised in traditional rows and pavilions, a range of virtual and live competitions, and attractions and bargains galore!

The VIRTUAL GAME FAIR in 2020 is a BRAND NEW CONCEPT for country sports people around the world. It is the first such virtual event to be up, running and trading and, with its blend of activities, exhibitors, competitions and special offers, it is set to become 'The Game Fair you can visit every day'.

## EXHIBITORS





# COMPETITIONS AT THE VIRTUAL GAME FAIR

## The Virtual Game Fair's First Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Championships

Sponsored by Smyths Country Sports & Feedwell.

Organised by Kieran Young and Starting 29 August running through to 31 October. Champion & Reserve Ch Lurcher, Ch & Res Ch Whippet & Ch and Reserve Ch Terrier will all qualify for the Five Nations Championships at Shanes Castle 27th

June 2021 AND for the final a new competition at Shanes Castle where they meet the winners of the Gundog Show under gundog & working dog judges to compete to be crowned the VGF All Ireland Working Dog Champion and win a substantial prize.

Prizes : BIS Barbour Coat plus Crystal Trophy

Champions : Superb Vintage Trophies plus Feedwell Dog Food

Res Champions : Engraved Hip Flask plus Feedwell Dog Food.

Other prizes by Marwalsh/Dublin Leather



## Country Sports Writing

This competition is for storytellers who can capture the 'giant spirit' of country sports and living on the page in any fiction or non-fiction form.

There are two categories: Adult's writing and Children's writing (under 18 years).

The prizes include a trophy and a choice from a list of sporting / countryside books for both adult and children's sections, tickets to the 2021 Game Fair at Shanes Castle and publication online and in the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine.

Visit [www.thevirtualgamefair.com](http://www.thevirtualgamefair.com) for entry details.



## Gundog Show

Sponsored by Feedwell and organised by Gundog Rescue

Four classes : HPR ,Pointers & Setters; Spaniels; Retrievers; Working Gundog

Heats judged by public vote then top two in each category judged by Shauna McGroarty.

Best overall wins a Barbour Coat and a Crystal Trophy

Winners in each section win an engraved Hip Flask.They also qualify for the final a new competition at Shanes Castle where they meet the winners of the Gundog Show under gundog & working dog judges to compete to be crowned the VGF All Ireland Working Dog and win a substantial prize. Other prizes to be announced.



*A winner from the recent Gundog Virtual Gundog Show*

## Gundog Trainer Competition

Sponsored by Red Mills



Best Submitted videos for:

Best Retrieve Dummy or Game land

Best Retrieve Dummy or Game water

Best flush spaniel

Best find, point and flush: Pointer.

Setter & HPR

Best overall wins a Barbour Coat and a Crystal Trophy

Winners in each section win an engraved Hip Flask.

Other prizes to be announced.

## Other Competitions

(arriving soon at [www.thevirtualgamefair.com](http://www.thevirtualgamefair.com))

**Fly Tying Championships**  
organised by APGAI Ireland

**Stickmaking Competition**  
organised by the Celtic Stickmakers - Carved Stick /Crooks only

**Horse & Donkey Shows**

**Country Sports Art Competition**

**Fishing, Shooting & Wildlife Photography Competition**

**Cookery Competition**

**Country Sports Video Competition**

# VGF

# The Virtual Game Fair

Organised in association with  
the Irish Country Sports & Country Life magazine  
& the Great Game Fairs of Ireland

## BARGAIN BASEMENT

Throughout the year each exhibitor will have several special offers on their 'stands' in the VGF some of which we will highlight on this page.

### FEEDWELL DOG FOOD

Receive 20% off purchase until 14th September using code "thevirtualgamefair" at checkout on website.

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www.feedwell.com

### RED MILLS

Engage is on offer in stores in NI until middle of September. The current offer is £5 off Duck, Salmon and Mother and Puppy and £3 off Beef and Chicken.

www.redmills.co.uk  
jenny.crozier@redmills.com

### DUCK DRI

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### EDINBURGH CLOTHING

Apply the following coupon code at the basket to achieve the 30% off discount - VIGF20 (will only work on chosen items).

• Kids Sologne Jacket Olive RRP £59 - 30% = £41.30 Sizes Age 8, Age 10, Age 12

www.edinburghoutdoorwear.com/product/percussion-kids-sologne-jacket-khaki-2016/

• Kids Sologne Jacket Marron RRP £59 - 30% = £41.30 Sizes from Age 6 - Age 16.

www.edinburghoutdoorwear.com/product/percussion-kids-sologne-jacket-khaki/

• Regatta Cera Softshell Black RRP £30 - 30% = £21 Sizes from Small - 3XL

www.edinburghoutdoorwear.com/product/regatta-cera-iii-soft-shell-jacket-black/

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### GRANNY SHAWS FUDGE FACTORY

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### COUNTRY SPORTS IRELAND



Virtual Game Fair Special Membership Offer. Visitors to the Virtual Game Fair on Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th August will be able to join Country Sports Ireland for only €30 / £25.

Membership of Country Sports Ireland includes outstanding insurance cover for recognised country sports, discounted access to leading training courses, free expert advice and support from local country sports experts and a growing number of member discount schemes.

This great offer is ONLY available on Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th August by visiting our stand at the Virtual Game Fair.

<https://countrysportsireland.org/signUpOffer.php>

### CHARLIE KEENAN COUNTRYWEAR

• www.charliekeenan.com/product/mens-fit-moleskin-trousers/ Get two for £50, use code 2450 at the checkout.

• www.charliekeenan.com/product/sherwood-forest-tattersall-shirt/ Get three for £50, use code 3450 at the checkout

• www.charliekeenan.com/product/comfort-thermo-max5-coat-from-prologic/ Buy the coat, get the trousers half price, used code suit4110 at the checkout

Also, as the game fair would have been on 29 & 30 August, a special code valid only for those two days, VGF2020 which will provide 20% off all articles in our Countrywear Section until midnight 30/08/2020.  
www.charliekeenan.com

### DRONE PILOT ACADEMY

20% off Beginner Drone Pilot Training Lessons  
£199 for 4-hour lesson.

www.dronepilotdeploy.com/drone-pilot-training--for-beginners-buy-it-fly-it

Promo Code: TheVirtualGameFair2020. Use at the checkout.

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FOR ONGOING AND  
NEW OFFERS

# With a view to have your weekend wide open

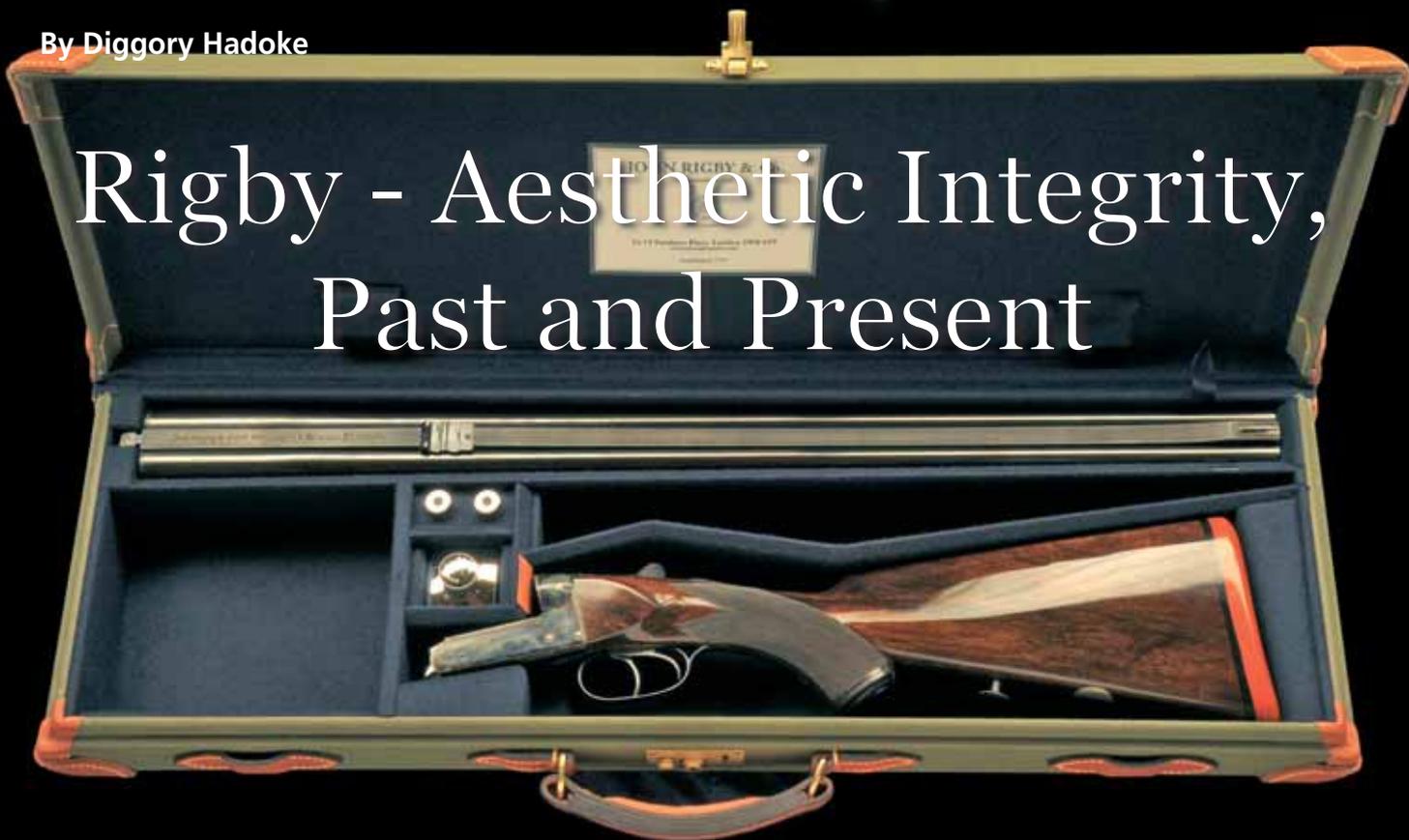


Start your day with a relaxing walk through Antrim Castle Gardens. Relax at the water's edge and enjoy the stunning views from Jordanstown Loughshore Park.

Plan your visit today: [www.visitantrimandnewtownabbey.com](http://www.visitantrimandnewtownabbey.com)



# Rigby - Aesthetic Integrity, Past and Present



*Vintage .470 boxlock double rifle in new leather and canvas case.*

The long timeline of Rigby's existence as a gunmaker spans most of the major developments in gunmaking. Having started business in 1775, the first of John Rigby's wares would have been flintlocks. His double-barrelled sporting guns moved from there, through the eras of percussion cap ignition, pin-fire and then centre-fire breech-loaders.

As the firearm developed, so the ownership and managerial responsibilities at Rigby's moved through the generations of the family; three men named 'John Rigby' headed the firm. The last one died in 1916 but the firm continued to be managed by a family member until 1951.

Rigby continued to develop their sporting guns through the mid-Victorian era, as hammer guns gave way to hammerless patents, including boxlock and side-lock variants, before arriving upon the stylish and reliable early 20th century hammerless side-lock ejector.

Double rifle output followed a similar path, while single-barrel rifles varied more widely; as actions, rifling and barrel-making advances offered gunmakers ever-greater possibilities for improving accuracy, rapidity of fire and reliability. Rigby was always an innovator and its guns carried a singular aesthetic style. Acid-etched Damascus barrels, for example. Even as early as the 1830s, Rigby made guns with

features that would be considered novel at the end of the century, like 'lift out' triggers and single triggers firing two barrels.

The commercial benefits associated with maintaining high-quality, constantly improving products and good business sense were legion. Moving from Dublin to London opened Rigby to a wider, more prosperous, clientele and this led to some notable people of their day to the doors of the firm. Many of the guns made for famous sportsmen and women are still in circulation and the order books still reside at the current Rigby premises in London, marking the occasion of the birth of each shotgun, rifle or pistol.

### **Notable clients included royalty and professional hunters**

Rigby products range from Bissell patent 'Rising Bite' double rifles, through Mauser action bolt-rifles, to Kell-engraved, side-lock ejector, shotguns. Clients included tiger hunter Jim Corbett, HRH King George VI, elephant hunter John 'Pondoro' Taylor, Professional Hunter Philip Percival, Lt.Col. George Armstrong Custer of 'Custer's last stand' notoriety, 'Wanderings of an Elephant Hunter' author W.D.M 'Karamojo' Bell, and Karen Blixen's lover, made famous in 'Out of Africa', Denys Finch-Hatton.

Maharajahs were the men of means

who possessed the inclination to purchase large numbers of elaborate and expensive sporting guns for their collections. The rulers of the Indian principalities had vast fortunes and held their traditional local powers but no real power outside of those; being watched over and 'advised' by British political officers. This ensured no warring between states and held the peace which was all important for the effective and economic administration of the 'Raj.' As a result, many of the maharajahs turned to sporting pursuits as an outlet for their energies and passions.

One such man was Fateh Sigh, the 31st Maharana of Udaipur. He bought 16 rifles from Rigby, including a .470 nitro-express, number 16902, which has typical Rigby dipped edge bar-locks and a shouldered action with vertical bolt. The fortunes of the maharajahs took a turn for the worse in 1972, when Indira Ghandi removed their titles and privileges. This led to many selling off their rifle collections to foreign collectors, in order to help their finances. No. 16902 was repatriated and the standard 'best' engraving and finish was enhanced to appeal to American collectors, who were then the principal buyers of such things.

The top English engraver of his day, Ken Hunt, added a gold portrait of a lion and further gold borders and foliate scrolls to the locks and action, and the



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*The floor plate on the record breaking Corbett donation rifle.*

rifle found a new home in the Petersen Collection, in Virginia. Now, it depends on your point of view whether you consider this treatment an improvement to a relatively traditional gun, turning it into a work of art, or the gaudy desecration of a perfect example of its type, in order to appeal to the questionable tastes of the nouveaux riche. I leave it to the reader to decide.

A similar fate befell another of Fateh Singh's Rigby's. This one, a 1903 vertical-bolt double in .350 (No.2). It was re-barrelled by Rigby in 1981 in the modern calibre of 9.3x74R. This was quite common at the time. The old calibres were no longer commercially available and the rifles, superb as they were, could not easily be sold to hunters. Converting them to an easily available alternative of similar specification was seen as a practical remedy. While re-barrelling was being undertaken, the locks and action were embellished with gold inlay and the addition of African

animals, such as elephant, buffalo and kudu. It even has some tribesmen on it. Again, I leave it to the reader to decide if adding African animals to a rifle made for India and altering traditional British 'best' to become 'exhibition bling' was a triumph of re-invention or what Prince Charles may have called a 'carbuncle on the face of an old friend'.

### **Rigby introduces the Mauser bolt-action rifle to the British market**

Rigby is not known only as a maker of best double rifles, the firm also introduced the Mauser bolt-action rifle to the British market and many Professional Hunters and amateur sportsmen bought them as practical alternatives. Among the best-known Rigby Mauser .275 rifles is the one used by Jim Corbett to kill the 'man eating leopard of Rudraprayag'. It was a gift from the Administration for his having killed a man-eating tiger in 1907. Corbett clearly used the rifle to the point of exhaustion, current managing director, Marc Newton tested it recently and reported bullets going through the paper sideways! To celebrate Corbett's exploits and his association with Rigby, they built an exhibition rifle of the same type but featuring relief engraving of scenes from Corbett's wonderful books on all the metal surfaces. This is a landmark rifle that was auctioned at SCI in 2016 for a record \$250,000, which still stands today.

Another Rigby-Mauser user was W.D.M. Bell, the renowned elephant hunter, who left Scotland as a penniless adventurer and returned a wealthy man, having ventured repeatedly into the unknown interior of Africa to hunt elephants and sell the ivory he collected. Most elephant hunters of his day used the biggest rifle they could get hold of. Bell, initially for reasons of financial embarrassment, used small calibre rifles,

including a number of Rigby Mauser .275 bolt-actions. He came to prefer them, using his exacting knowledge of elephant anatomy to brain shoot his quarry from any angle, relying on the penetration and accuracy of his rifles over the traditional 'stopping power' of the more widely favoured .577 or .470 doubles then in use.

### **Rigby's essence of tradition**

What encapsulates the essence of the Rigby tradition is not the highly embellished exhibition piece, but the traditional, subtly engraved, beautifully proportioned, classic lines of their great sporting guns and rifles. Rigby sporting arms are thoroughbreds and you can see it in their shapes and feel it in their every operation. They were, and are, essentially the best they could be, with form following function and class winning over compromise every time.

While best known for their bolt-action rifles and 'Rising Bite' doubles, Rigby sold a large number of shotguns, of hammer, side-lock and boxlock form, the favoured design evolving with the market. Perhaps the most elegant of Rigby's shotguns, takes the form of the dipped-edge lock gun.

Perhaps the most elegant of Rigby's shotguns, takes the form of the dipped-edge lock gun. It was engraved by the great Harry Kell and features his distinctive scrolls and deftly carved fences. Made in 1930, with bar-locks, top grade dark walnut and 30" steel barrels, it represents the classic English side-lock of the period. Subtle, rather than gaudy, classy rather than attention seeking, it shows Rigby's best work in a fully developed side-lock ejector gun, the likes of which, many would argue, have never been bettered.

For more information about John Rigby & Co., visit: [www.johnrigbyandco.com](http://www.johnrigbyandco.com)



*A historic Rigby Rising Bite.*



*This Rigby back action side-lock 12-bore is made on a Scott action and is typical of the style of the 1880s, when gunmakers were experimenting with new designs. The fine scroll engraving and gothic lettering are very 'Rigby'.*

# Shooting until the cows come home!

*Blending into the background as much as possible.*

Looking across the fields it is always pleasing to see a few brown spots close to the hedges. If you see those brown spots move, or even stand up and become brown V-shapes, so much the better, it is infinitely better to stalk a rabbit than a fresh molehill, but I have to confess to having sneaked into range of the odd molehill in the past, and I probably will again, hence the observation for movement, before embarking on a strategic manoeuvre.

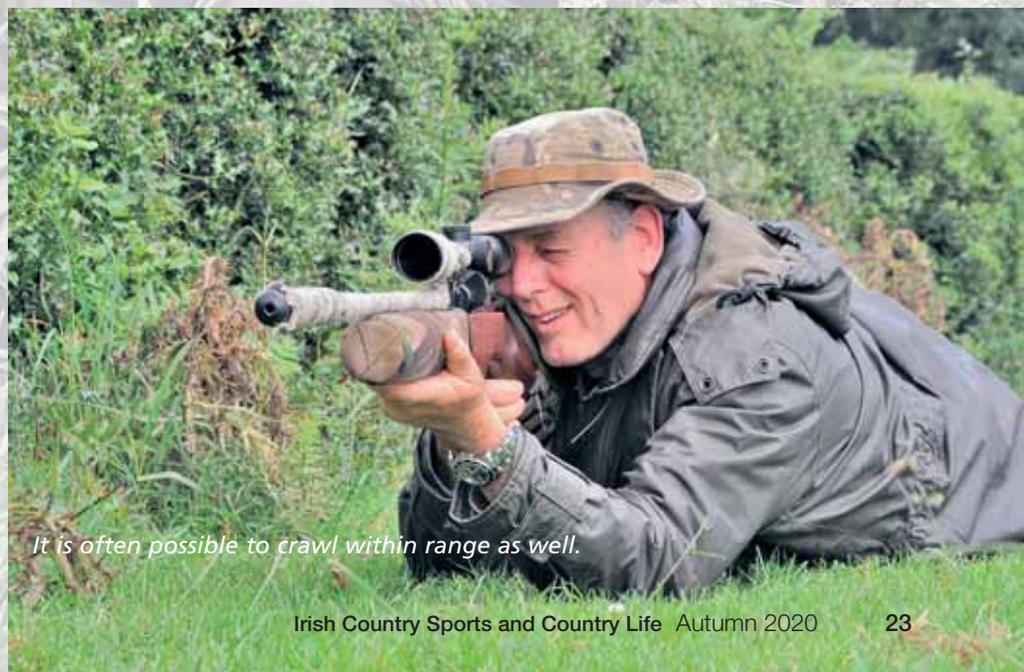
My favourite time to shoot rabbits is in the late, evening sunshine, from when the shadows start to lengthen through to when you can no longer see to shoot effectively. I much prefer the evening to the morning, the ground is dry for one thing, so lying in the grass for hours doesn't leave you soaked to the skin and the warmth of the day has been stored in the earth. Early morning forays invariably involve getting wet,

especially in the spring and autumn when the dew lies heavy on the grass and there is nearly always a chill in the air.

Stalking through dry grass it is also easier to remain less conspicuous, crawling absolutely flat to the ground, using just a thistle or slight bump in the

ground as cover, face pressed close to the sward so the leaves of the grass tickle your nose. By moving smoothly and slowly it is possible to crawl within easy range of grazing bunnies so you can get off a well considered and accurate shot.

Empty fields, those left for



*It is often possible to crawl within range as well.*

conservation crops, are an easy proposition. Once the stock has been turned out your job is made a whole lot harder. Irrespective of how carefully you move, how low you keep your profile, cows are always inquisitive, especially when they have just been turned out. Dairy cows are less of a problem than suckler cows, because they are used to human interaction, being fetched in twice a day for milking. Beef cows though are a completely different proposition and you need to have your wits about you and be confident around stock, especially if, like I had, there is a bull running with them.

I made my way up the hill from the gate to the brow, where the field flattens off and over the crest rabbits sit out along the hedgerow. On any normal day you can make this approach stealthily, unseen until you break the skyline, but by dropping to the ground and belly crawling the last few yards the crest can be reached without alerting the rabbits at all. With the cows in the field this is impossible. From the moment you open the gate, their eyes are on you and you have to behave very differently.

Initial eye contact is all well and good, but then you need to simply ignore them. If you shout at them the rabbits will hear you and dart for cover anyway and the cows will think it is a



*A bull running with the cows, with calves at foot showing great interest.*

game. I lie down and keep still, this confuses the creatures and they will come over, gently trying to work out what it is you are doing, but not seeing you as a threat. Invariably they will surround you, as they would a predator, which makes life a bit awkward as to taking a shot, but the positive is that any rabbits will not see you either. You can use this time to inch your way closer to the feeding area. Once within range just relax and put your face down.

Invariably, after a few minutes, you will hear the sniffing from an outstretched nose and possibly the tugging of a rasping tongue, exploring your feet or sleeve. The rule is to only move very slowly and smoothly, sudden movements will cause consternation amongst the cows and their calves and the flight mode is likely to kick in. The

last thing you want is the entire herd galloping all over the field frightening every rabbit on the parish.

In this particular field the cows are quite protective and have been known to charge walkers. They are Belgian Blue crosses mostly, big, muscled cows with an attitude problem and a strong desire to protect their calves, which were only a few weeks old. I had to play it very cool, just like Delboy and by being patient I managed to get a couple of nice clean shots without spooking the cows. I got up and walked to my rabbits so as to get them paunched and hanging as soon as possible. The cattle were now placated and I managed to shoot the length of the other hedge without an audience, ending the evening with a handful of fully grown rabbits in excellent condition.



*A good bag at the end of the evening.*

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# Sika stalking

*The high mountains where we are to camp for three days.*

It's early September and the deer hunting season has just opened here in Ireland, as I eagerly await to be joined by my hunting colleagues at the entrance to the forest. The light coloured fumes from the Land Rover Defender are bellowing into the night sky and in the distance I hear the faint whistle of a Sika stag. Sika stags make three whistles as their mating call it's eerie at the best of times but an unforgettable sound.

Shortly afterwards, I am delighted to hear the guys' jeep moving towards me up the gravel track and within minutes they have arrived safely. We greet each other in the muffled toned voices common method between fellow hunters, the deer may be kilometres away but no one is taking any chances!

Parking our vehicles at the trail head in the pre-dawn hours, my focus now turns to getting my equipment in order, for this sika stalking adventure. We

were going to camp out on the hill for three days and re-hone our stalking skills after a 6 month hiatus. In Ireland the deer stalking season runs from 1st September until the 28th of February. Stalking followed by camping out on your hunting grounds is an incredible experience and I recommend everyone should experience it.

Indigenous to eastern Asia, the Japanese islands, Taiwan and the mainland from Manchuria to Vietnam, Sika (meaning 'deer' in Japanese) were introduced to Ireland by Lord Powerscourt in 1860. The single stag and three hinds were purchased as ornamental park deer, but by now escaped the deer have flourished and are truly wild, occupying the entire mountainous county of Wicklow on the East coast of Ireland and have spread to many other counties. The population is estimated to be around 35000 animals. A stag weighs between 50-60kg and

hinds weigh between 30-40kg. An adult stag has a shoulder height of 70 to 95cm, while hinds are somewhat smaller, 50 to 90cm at shoulder height. Hinds give birth to generally a single spotted offspring from May to early June after a gestation period of 7 ½ months.

Excitement mounts as we plot our route to take on the mountain but loading a heavy pack on your back brings you down to earth pretty quickly and so we are off on a three day sika hunt in the Wicklow Mountains. We cross the river that seems to be unusually high for this time of year but we maintained dry boots and the gaiters worked well.

As we leave the forest and move onto the open ground, we scan the hills at first light making out shapes, the grey shapes of a herd of sika. As the seconds pass, the light becomes better for finding the deer still in their summer



times being conscious not to fall or knock your rifle. I am thankful I invested in a decent rifle cover for such occasions.

After two hours of hiking, we leave the beige coloured deer grass that saturates the lower mountain slopes and move on to the purple heather clad hills of the mountain. The hills of Wicklow may not be the Rocky Mountains but - trust me - the damp ground clad with heather will test anyone's fitness.

High on the plateau we make camp by a small sheltered dry area. Learning from past experience we make camp in daylight and hatch a plan. We separate and stalk into different corries - valleys - setting out rules for animals to be culled and safe stalking procedures in case the worst happens. Being prepared and self-reliant in the mountains is a tier one priority.

The sun is well in the sky at this stage and a slight breeze is greeting my face. I am thankful for this for a number of reasons - it lets you know the wind direction and secondly it keeps the midges at bay. Every hill stalker knows the plight of these little critters. I have watched deer, appearing to have lost all sense and reasoning, run wildly up and down a mountain side in minutes that would take a human hours to traverse shaking their heads and snorting like dragons all to evade the plague of midges.

*Having a predetermined plan and safe operating procedures is paramount.*

coats. The summer coats of sika deer may be light in colour, but so is the deer grass that covers the hill. Scanning the hill using my Spartan precision quad stick to support my Swarovski EL binoculars I can see that that the herd is spread out across the hill in front of us, at a distance of 350 meters plus they are all hinds.

It's great to see a herd of sika numbering around 60 animals made up of hinds yearling and calves so early into the hunt. Talking to one's self is a common trait amongst hunters: "If the hinds are this low on the mountain the stags are going to be high up!"

We are happy to catch even a glimpse of deer but sneaking past a herd to get to the high ground is another thing. Using the terrain to evade the extremely alert sika deer is challenging but in Doric terms its simply good fun.

### ***Leap frogging from rock to rock while keeping your head down***

Sika are short on stature but high on attitude, they will tests your skill, humble you in seconds and leave you

wanting more. Using a bottle of powder to produce puffs of powder to determine wind direction and conscious that thermals will soon come in to play, we trudge on. Crossing mountain streams, leap frogging from rock to rock and keeping your head below the parapet of the mountain drainage stream, while having your 'home' in your frame pack - tent, food and other tuck for three days on the hill - is challenging while at all



*The Spartan precision tent was my home for the adventure on the mountain.*



*Waiting for the precise moment.*

Having reached the high ground, I drop my frame pack remembering this time to leave a small section of orange



*Norma 120 grain ballistic tip ammunition in 6.5x55mm is the Author's choice for an ethical humane stalk.*

material as a making point. The strip of florescent colour dances in the slight breeze. It can be great fun looking for your pack after a stalk and one can lose sense of distance and direction when the stalk becomes all encompassing. As a spectator sport it would be hard beat watching a hunter trying to retrace their steps while looking for their valued rucksack.

Crawling forward through the heather, saying goodbye to dry knees and elbows I inch forward to look in to a basin that is a known stag area. The problem is the fog has got here before me. The plus side is the wind has picked up, so hopefully the fog won't have a say in how long it can stay in the basin.

Using this time waiting for the fog to move I get my Blaser rifle out of my gun cover and placing four rounds in the magazine I inset it in the rifle but don't load a round into the chamber. I re-

check my optics and ensure the red dot on my scope is set for the changed weather conditions, setting the Swarovski scope at 8 x power, I then deploy my bipod and lie in wait, soaking in the water from the damp moss as well as the sounds and smells. I hear grouse in the distance, overhead I hear ravens speak, they must have followed us up the hill knowing full well our intention and hoping to catch a free meal.

### ***Fog rolls in and it's almost whiteout***

The fog is starting to clear, giving way to periods of clarity for a minute or so and in this time frame I have no choice but to scan frantically for deer. The first pass over of the fog, there is nothing seen but maybe... Ahh! It's frustrating, then more fog rolls in, followed by more periods of clarity. After moving no more than 200 meters in the past three hours or so, eventually I spot an antler in the heather. It's clad in velvet and I then I see the summer coat of a sika stag. The fog becomes an enemy again and rolls back in with the aid of a strong breeze. Its now almost a white out.

Fifteen minutes later, the fog rolls off the hill like a massive white silk sheet been pulled away, unveiling a purple hill of heather. At a distance of 500 meters there is a herd of stags laying down chewing the fat probably swapping stories about hinds.

Preferring to be above deer and stalking downhill but it's just not an option in this situation the deer are guarding the high ground, so I start off crawling in a large arc, trying to get as close as possible to the herd. Moving slowing through the heather, one becomes a botanist whether you like it or not. When the herd looks in your direction you remain as flat as possible to the ground with your head firmly planted the only available entrainment is to look at the roots of the heather and watch insects that call it home.

It took an hour and half to close to around 200 meters off the herd. My



to move off without seeing who caused that enormous thunder clap. Allowing time to approach a shot animal is important. Fifteen minutes later, I approach the place where the stag has been, easily found as I had plenty of time previously to mentally mark this area - the white patch on the bolder adjacent to where the stag stood before the shot. I can see light coloured frothy blood, meaning the bullet has passed through the lungs of the stag. different shots give different reactions and colour and types of blood trails.

I locate the stag and get on with the task of gralloching (field dressing) then pack the animal out on my frame pack and set off to our camp site. My two companions are still out stalking on different sections of the hill and by the time I get there it's late evening.

There is a feeling of weightlessness having just dropped a 45kg pack off your shoulders having traversed the mountains for a few hours. Eventually the others return and I am delighted to see they have also been successful. Over the next days we take another few selected cull animals and with our first stags for the season accounted for, talk is of our next hunting trip in October, when the sika stags are in full rut.

Nights in the mountains are cold and the wind can hammer the Spartan tent, but after a hard day's hunting it's not long before the soundtrack of the wind fades and you are fast asleep. Back country hunting is a humbling experience and I think every hunter should do this to appreciate how hard lives deer have.

Deer stalking is a gift; to be in wild places hunting wild animals is an incredible experience. Harvesting organic meat is a privilege and doing so in an area where our ancestors hunted deer for millennia is to be cherished. Hunting is different things to different people, but to me it's to be in wild places seeing wild things and swapping stories with friends high on the hills of Wicklow, around a camp fire gazing into the embers, making memories not dreams.

*With the stag successfully culled the next task is to bring it off the hill.*

objective was to get to as close as possible to the herd to insure a quick ethical shot and secondly to get to a small knoll that would give me cover. This elevated position would also provide a safe back drop too.

There are now 16 stags in view all laying in the heather. I scan the herd with my binoculars and pick out a sika stag that fits the cull plan of this hunting ground. His distance is confirmed using my range finding binoculars at 198 meters, the stag is unaware of my presence and is just about to stand up. I move my rifle into position keeping it low using the bipods and open the scope covers. I use a rear bag to place the rifle in a rock steady position. Adjusting the scope for clarity, I re-confirm distance now that the stag is on his feet.

### ***I consciously hold my breath***

He seems unaware to my presence.

My crosshairs are where I want them to be right on the shoulder... the stags head is down grazing. I patiently wait for the deer to lift his head so if a shot does present itself the internal organs are not compacted. The stag lifts its head and looks in my direction, then back up the mountain away from me and then looks straight in front. This is my chance. I inhale with intent then half way through the exhale I hold my breath and hear my sub conscious say NOW. The 6.5x55mm calibre 120 grain Norma leaves my barrel at the speed of 860 meters per second the recoil is minimal. I see the bullet strike the stag, he lurches forward, kicking out his back legs and runs downhill out of sight. It has all the hallmarks of a good shot.

The rest of the herd jump to their feet, look around, then run up hill, while I remain out of sight allowing the stags

# Hunting, Sho



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# otting, Fishing

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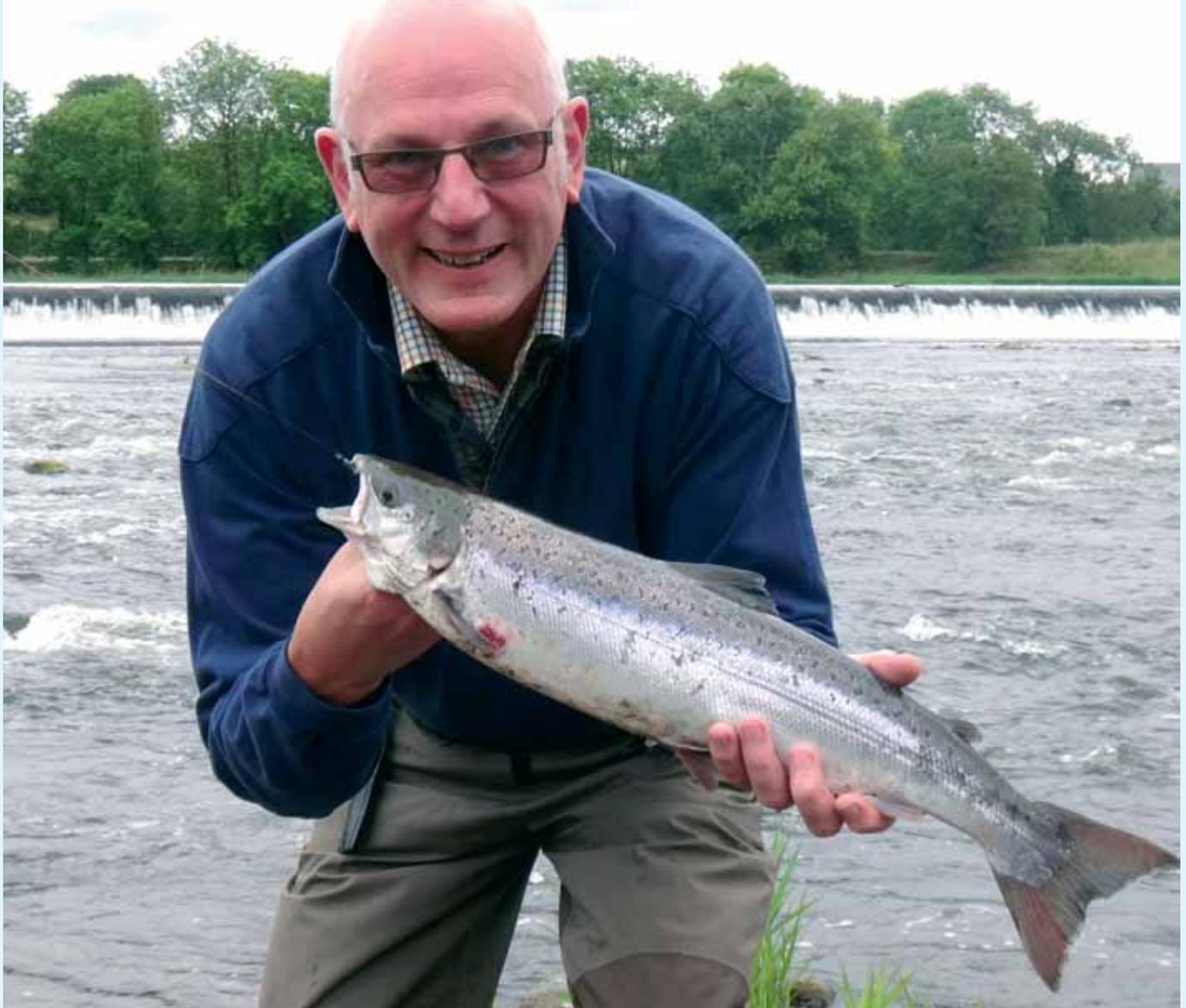
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By Stephen Smyth

# Three generations fishing for wild Bann salmon



*The author with one of the fine fish caught and released that day.*

When my late father Russell introduced me to salmon fishing almost sixty years ago, it was quite a different sport. The worm was deadly, a bunch of three big blackheads below a pinch of split shot. Spinning was popular with the Stukii, a half scaled copper and silver spoon, being the most favoured, along with Tobys, blue and silver Devon Minnows and No. 2 Mepps. Fly fishing was occasionally practised when conditions were right, with sinking lines and heavy, three or four piece, split cane rods, and

shrimping was hardly seen at all.

But the great thing was, back then, there were fantastic numbers of wild salmon in all our local rivers, and almost everybody caught a few. Fishermen also were different in those days, everything caught was one for the table, nothing was wasted or just destroyed, and everything was relaxed, Fishing was like a day out. This old fashioned type of sustainable fishing lasted for decades, recreational angling did not affect the salmon numbers, if anything the salmon count increased

and there was plenty of fish for everyone.

My father Russell truly loved fishing, but he loved especially all our family going with him, including my mother, and she also caught them. An ideal day would be three or four fish of any type caught, and everybody getting one each. If you caught one, dad would then organise it that you relaxed and didn't fish again until everyone else had been successful. He encouraged everybody to go fishing with him, friends and their children too, and he was happy not



*Eddie got into position behind John.*

fishing himself but setting up and looking after everyone else. He always was a true sportsman.

Against this background, I have been trying to get my son John a salmon on the fly at Carnroe, and make him the third generation of the Smyth family to do so. Dad caught hundreds over his lifetime and he was undoubtedly a special favourite of the Carnroe boatman ‘Old’ Charlie Torrens. ‘Old’ Charlie, Dessie and ‘Big’ Willie Wilson have all made sure that I also have caught a few. This season Willie and I have been determined to get John, when he was home from his studies in London, a Bann salmon on the fly. All the exams were now finished, and during the previous week John had his first two contacts with the “King of Fish”. But nothing had stuck: nobody’s fault, in all types of fishing, this happens. It has been hard going with the fly this year, but we knew he was getting closer and closer.

Well, only a few had been caught on the fly during the week, the shrimpers were getting plenty, but now I had a



*Decky (on the right) was the trusted netsman.*

new, secret weapon. For the past forty years, for the shop, dad and I have bought worms, prawns and flies, from our great friend ‘King’ Billy Peden. On the day of dad’s funeral, Billy was the first man to arrive at the Church door, with tears streaming down his cheeks, so he will always be our special friend. Billy has retired now, but his son Robert keeps the bait business going and last week, when Robert made another

delivery to our shop, I told him the latest about John’s quest. “I’ll get you a fly that’ll work,” he said. “I’ll post it down to you. It catches salmon everywhere.”

### ***We decided to fish with ‘Billy’s Special’***

The fly duly arrived, it looked great, and I thought right, for old time’s sake, John will fish the whole shift with



*The author's late father Russell.*

Billy's Special. John flogged the stream at The Throw for hours, casting perfectly, swinging the fly round nicely, dabbling it up, down and across in the streams and, despite seeing loads of fish, not even an offer. When you keep seeing the salmon jumping, it encourages you, and John kept persevering and fished on and on. There just is no other way.

Hours later, when we eventually took a break, of course our friend Decky stepped in, and within fifteen minutes had the day's first fish on the fly, an excellent, fresh, eight pounder. Maybe the salmon were on the take at last, who knows, but we immediately abandoned our cup of tea with Willie, and almost ran to get started back into it. This time John took his own path, wading out in the deeper water towards The Island and fishing the stream back in towards The Hut. Plenty of fish were still jumping and all we needed was a bit of luck. I trusted that fly and John was fishing well. Come on, come on, and give us just that wee bit of luck.

And then it happened. In slow motion I saw the whole take, the salmon turning on the fly, John letting go of the loop of line in his hand and raising the

rod tip. Crash, bang, wallop, the salmon was on and really well hooked. It tore off, across and downstream, taking loads of line from the reel. My trouble now was that John was out in the middle of the river across the stream and there wasn't a chance I could wade out to him in my thigh boots.

The other anglers we fish with are all our mates so, when I started hollering for help, they immediately stopped their fishing, pulled up anchor, and started out in their boats over to help John. He kept the rod tip up, and kept the rod bent nicely into the fish, which at times was a good thirty yards below him and was very lively, jumping, running and darting in the stream.

### ***As cool as 'Cool Hand Luke'***

John had no chance of wading away from the precarious spot where he was standing when he hooked the fish, so the salmon was going to have to be battled back upstream, against the heavy current, to him. We all hoped that our knots were sound, and that it was really well hooked to take that upstream strain. Big Eddie, who runs our

syndicate, got well positioned right in beside John, and Decky became the trusted nets man. The good thing was, all three of them were as cool as 'Cool Hand Luke' and left all the panicking and stress to me watching anxiously from twenty yards away.

Fifteen, nerve-tingling minutes later, when Decky expertly scooped the eight pounder into the net, everyone cheered. I was so elated for John and very, very relieved. A few quick photos, it was a bar of silver, straight in from the sea that day, and the sea lice still had their tails attached. Very quickly the fish was released unharmed to continue its upstream journey.

I've taught John that for us, one salmon a day is enough. For over fifteen years I have immediately stopped fishing if I catch one. We try and store our luck for the next time, and don't throw another cast to try and catch two in a day. Both of us are very happy to do this catch, release and stop.

"Right son, home at top speed and we will call and show granny the photos and you can tell her all about it." I did this exact same journey many years ago with dad, and now with John. It reminded us all of golden times, salmon fishing at Carnroe with my father, and this special day was a new memory for John and me to cherish forever.



*Father & son share a treasured moment before slipping the fish back.*



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# The Ideal Hunting Rifle?

**H**unting rifles are designed specifically for use on live game. Regardless of calibre, magazine capacity, scope/no scope, the sole purpose for their existence is to despatch a targeted animal quickly and humanely. Bolt-action rifles are the most popular choice in Irish hunting circles. Notwithstanding that while both small-bore and centre-fire semi-automatics play an important niche in vermin control - neither type is better, they're just different - bolt action rifles from .22 to .30cal are the main focus here.

Whether a firearm is a budget model or top of the range – and there is a bewildering selection of rifles to choose from - it has to be capable of competently performing the task required. In Ireland this varies from vermin culling through to deer stalking. Beyond this island a larger calibre rifle may be required for hunting wild boar or big game up to and including dangerous game.

Whatever its purpose, total reliability has to be the most important factor

along with the usual criteria of accuracy, type of sights, magazine capacity, trigger- pull, stock design/length, to name but a few. Smooth bolt function that chambers and extracts cartridge cases without jamming is paramount, as is a well-designed safety catch. Weight can be an important factor too – rifles tend to become heavier as the day wears on. Many of us will purchase based on a manufacturer's reputation, previous experience, financial outlay or word of mouth.

Perhaps even because we like the good looks! Stocks, synthetic or fashioned from walnut with a nice grain can be a major issue—a matter of personal preference. Professionals and regular hunters who brave inclement weather frequently opt for synthetic products. I mostly avoid them having previously owned a stainless steel 6.5 X 55cal rifle fitted with a synthetic stock. The firearm performed flawlessly on the hill and produced tight groups on the practise range, but in my opinion it just lacked character.

## ***The most important factors must be reliability and accuracy***

A timber stock has an air of authenticity along with good looks good when it's polished; admittedly I'm probably just old-fashioned about firearms. The latest super-duper gadgets are of no interest and while my air rifle is fitted with a synthetic stock, in my opinion an air rifle isn't a real firearm anyway, despite legislation stating otherwise.

Whatever about cost or appearance the most important factors must be reliability and accuracy.

Hunting publications frequently consider a rifle that can produce 2" groups at 100 metres as sufficiently accurate and acceptable for fieldwork. It probably is, although experienced sport shooters and professionals expect a far higher standard, many not settling for less than 3 shots either grouping in under one inch at that distance or even clover-leafing. Barrel length is not really a factor in accuracy despite



*Fanie Kruger testing his home-built .308 rifle (the author's Mauser .270 is in the foreground).*

*Enthusiast's rifle with stock based on an eagle design. Calibre unknown.*



legends about longer ones delivering superior groups. Short barrels of the same thickness as longer versions are more accurate than the latter, being less prone to vibration and wobble as a bullet spins its way to exit at the muzzle - barrel harmonics!

The exceptions are target and sniper rifles with longer, thicker and more stable glass-bedded barrels. Barrel twist, already pre-determined by the manufacturer plays an important part in accuracy, unless you have the facilities and ability to build your own rifle and twist to suit. See the accompanying photo of a colleague Fanie Kruger in Pretoria, South Africa with a .308cal rifle that he built in his home workshop. Using a second-hand stock plus an action picked up somewhere; he had a gunsmith ream out a blank barrel to .308cal and put the lot together.

A rifle fitted with a decent 'scope will be easier to line up on target as opposed to one using iron sights, and while the target will be clearer that doesn't make it more accurate. Ammunition also plays a major role in accuracy. The more you pay the better it gets, or so it should. Premium brands are expected to perform flawlessly whether rim-fire or centre-fire, registering better results than would budget brands. Hollow-point expanding jacketed bullets that mushroom on impact are superior to solid rounds for hunting purposes on this island although different rules apply for big game.



*Problem ammunition (L - R) .38 Special round along with the bullet that failed to exit the barrel and lead centre of the round that had to be forcefully cleared*

Unfortunately, bullet failure in the field will cancel the best efforts of a good rifle - even in experienced hands. Regular readers of Irish Country Sports and Country Life may recall an incident I referred to last year when faulty ammunition caused problems on a buffalo hunt in Africa. Just prior to Christmas last, premium .357cal ammunition caused major on-range problems in my lever rifle. The first shot didn't exit the rifle barrel; the bullet progressing as far as 3 inches from the muzzle. Assuming it to be a damp squib due to insufficient or loss of propellant in the manufacturing process, it was easily cleared with a cleaning rod. Shot number two also jammed short of the muzzle taking two hours to clear gently using various punches and drills plus a measured amount of force. The lead core exited first, leaving the copper jacket behind and this took most effort to remove without damage to the

barrel. Luckily some colleagues had the necessary equipment on hand to clear the rifle, otherwise I might still be at it.

### ***It was premium USA ammunition***

Clearly that second bullet was well over-sized for calibre and that's a manufacturing problem. Bullets are designed to be marginally oversized in order to engage the rifling; quality control appears to have been lacking in these instances. This premium ammunition was made in the USA, as was the .416 round that failed in Africa, each produced by different manufacturers. So beware; if ignition is not instantaneous, wait a few minutes before checking the bore - from the rear!

Accuracy is not necessarily dictated by ammunition brands. Some rifle manufacturers undersize the rifle's bore in the manufacturing process which will reduce group size, but increases overall pressure on ignition. Another method is reaming the chamber out to tighter tolerances. However, while tight bores, chambers and resulting shorter bullet jump-space to engage the rifling will increase both accuracy and velocity, they will result in shorter barrel life along with occasional difficulties in chambering rounds or extracting fired cases. A jammed case on the hill will prevent a shot - or delay a follow-up shot if it's required. Whereas in a dangerous game situation that might



*The Czech-made .22 CZ is one of Ireland's most popular small-bore hunting rifles.*



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*Lee Enfields are used these days for hunting and target shooting.*

prove catastrophic; giving the hunter a mighty headache. Indeed it could be the last headache he/she would ever have.

Reliability is by far the most critical factor in any hunting rifle. Ease of chambering a live round or ejecting the spent cartridge despite dirt or mud clogging the chamber - it can happen - is far more preferable to a high precision tack-driver that will jam occasionally. A crisp adjustable two-stage trigger goes a long way towards taking a successful shot and a rubber recoil-pad fitted to larger calibre rifles is an advantage particularly for recoil-shy shooters. That particular problem can be overcome by reverting to "training" with a .22 rifle and slowly upgrading to the calibre that caused the difficulty in

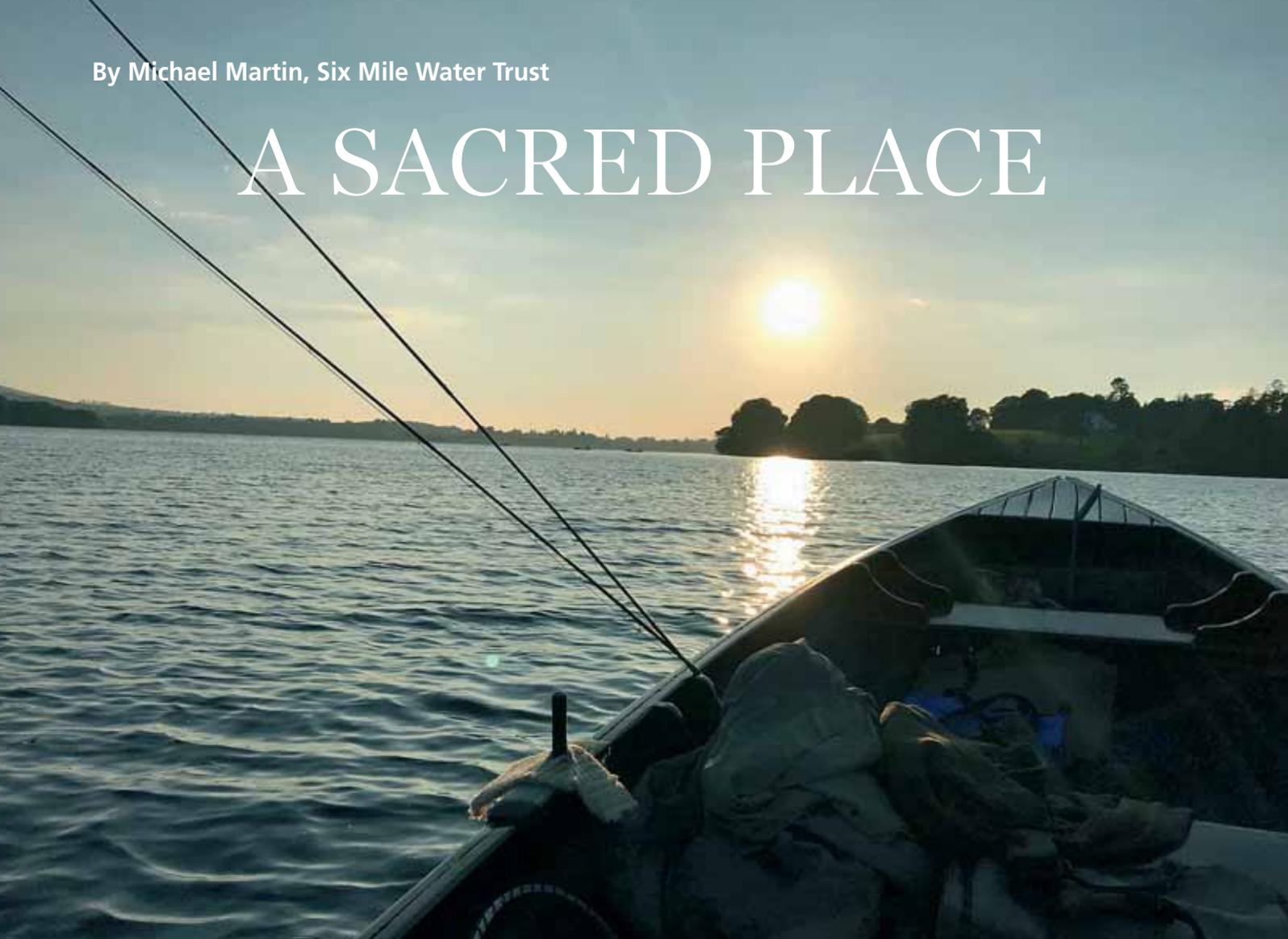
the first place. Hunters bitten by the recoil bug might also consider extra range practise well in advance of taking to the field. Alternatively a muzzle-break fitted to the offending rifle (by a professional) will ease recoil through dissipating blast/gasses sideways, but it won't make its owner popular on shooting ranges.

A hunter using a reliable, accurate, firearm might consider availing of as much range practise as possible in order to maintain a high standard of marksmanship. We owe that to whatever quarry we pursue. Overall, under normal conditions any animal can be humanely despatched with a decent hunting rifle of appropriate calibre. Would-be buyers have a lot to gain in seeking the opinion

of experienced hunters who would be pleased to advise on calibre, choice of scope, moderator or no moderator etc. Choosing a hunting rifle, cost aside, is often dictated by a manufacturer's reputation and suitability for the purpose for which it's required.

The ideal hunting rifle per se doesn't really exist; no more than does the ideal motor car or anything else. The buyer's perception plays a major role in decision-making. The late Bob Hagel, a highly respected US gun-writer, once wrote "you should not use a rifle that will kill an animal when everything goes right. You should use one that will do the job when everything goes wrong." Factor that into your choice of an ideal hunting rifle!

# A SACRED PLACE



*Wonderful Lough Arrow where the story takes place.*

As we navigate through the worst catastrophe since WWII our thoughts go out to those close to our hearts who are vulnerable, many lives will be changed forever in the aftermath of Covid 19 and we must do what we can to support each other in these dark days.

As an angler I feel blessed to have such wide circle of friends, having an interest in angling opens the door to many friendships, indeed many a friendship has been forged through Albert Tiitterington's fantastic Game & Country Fair which brings together country sports enthusiasts from all walks of life, an invaluable opportunity to meet friends old and new, to catch up, buy new tackle and get refresher lessons on our casting and fly dressing from that trio – Joe Stitt, Paddy Mulholland and Arthur Greenwood, the APGAI veterans with a host of qualifications and an inspiration to all who meet them, no Game Fair would be the same without

these much loved characters, you couldn't meet a more professional, skilled and unassuming bunch of friends and I never leave their company without having learned something.

The Brotherhood of the Angle provides great company, we are so fortunate in that respect but I fear for those who will have cast their last fly before this is viral scourge has left us. Rather than bang on about bad times I'll try to describe an evening's sport which will help the uninitiated to understand why we are so passionate about our sport, why anglers can relate so readily, their experiences shared in incredibly beautiful surroundings where we can become immersed in nature and lose ourselves in the countryside. Let me take you with me on a trip to a location, one or two of you may already be familiar with it.

It's a beautiful early summer's evening as we turn the car left at McDermott's pub to wend down the

little country lanes hemmed in by high summer herbage, wild flowers and blackthorn hedges, passing tiny farmsteads and cottages until we top the brow of a hill and Lough Arrow (Arbhach) sweeps into view.

Cradled by the Bricklieve mountains, she is largely spring fed with shimmering blue waters stretching away for almost four miles, surrounded by lush woodlands and meadows, islands sitting proudly in the centre and little headlands and intimate bays dotted around the shoreline.

I stop briefly by the bridge over the Lough outflow, peering down into the River Unshin, the small trout hold station in water so clear they look as if they're suspended in air. Every now and again there's silver flash against the vivid green weed and sparkling golden gravel as a trout rises to take a nymph and returns to hold station in the current once more.

We continue on, veering right at the



*A Leopard spotted trout returned to Arrow's dark waters.*



*We put the world to rights over a cup of tea.*

old Riverstown crossroads and following the shoreline until we come to the tiny jetty. Finnian Dodd hires out his boats from here, one of life's true gentlemen, and as usual we find him tinkering with an old boat engine, his weathered face beaming as he imparts his wisdom on what's happening out on the water. This has been an ambition of my dad for years now, a lifetime as a Scout Leader, he always wanted to see Baden-Powell's residence in Ireland and, as Finnian and I chatted, I could see dad take in the amazing scenery and atmosphere of this magical place.

The old Evinrude splutters into life and we motor across the bay to a place I know well. Minutes later we're sitting beneath one of the huge oak trees on the shoreline of a peninsula, Robert Baden-Powell's mansion overlooks us perched up on the hill. Across the bay, the ruins of Ballindoon Abbey stand nestled in a quiet corner, the swifts and swallows hawk around the gravestones, jackdaws and kestrels nest in it's ancient walls.

***On a still evening like this there is profound peacefulness***

This land is dotted with ancient monuments, Carrowkeel megalithic cemetery, Moytura passage tombs, standing stones and crannogs. As we sit in the dappled sun under the old oak trees the smell of wild mint and meadow sweet is joined by the wood smoke curling up from the brewing Kelly Kettle. The water gently laps the side of the boat as the sand martins and a family of swans pick off insects over the water. A reed warbler sings from the sedges, nesting terns and sheep bleating on the hillsides are the only sounds. There are few roads here and only the odd farmstead, on a still evening such as this there is a profound peacefulness, it's a little corner of Ireland untainted by the modern world.

Dad is in his element as we sup smokey tea amid the stunning sun-bathed scenery, he has been ill for some time and at this moment we are miles away from all our troubles in this

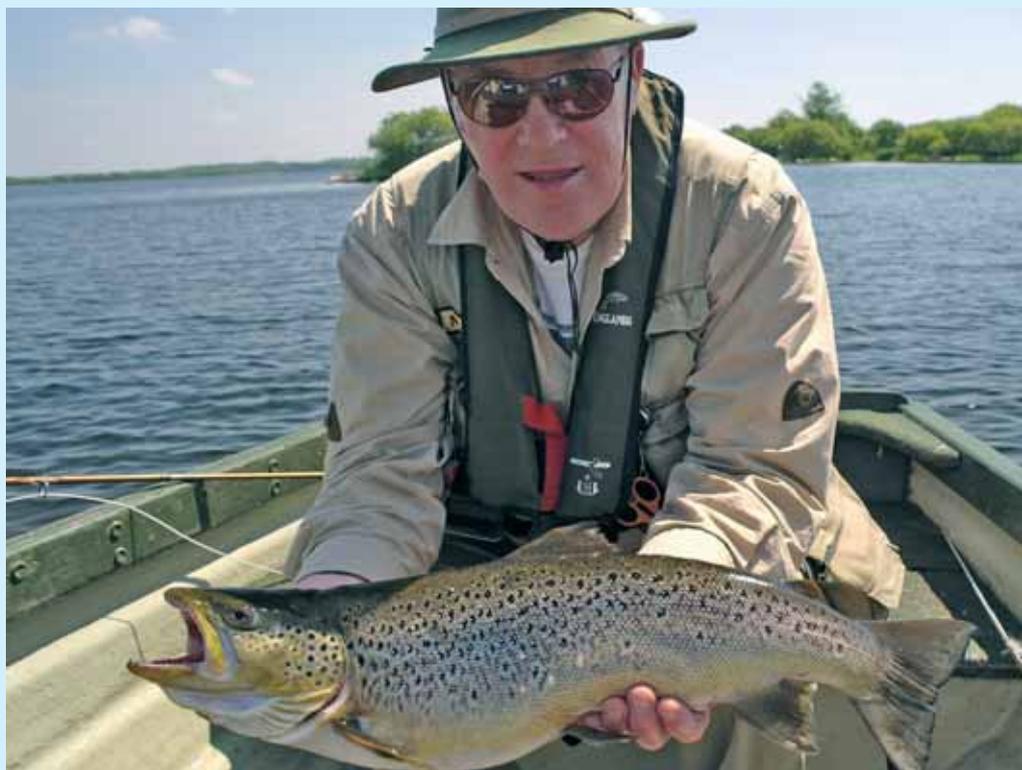
magical timeless place. When the sun drops lower and the shadows lengthen it's time to push out over the water, little trout have been rising to the grousewing sedges under the overhanging branches and we are hoping their larger brethren will begin rising out in the open water.

Despite searching for over an hour on a lough surface littered with caenis, black gnats and out of season mayfly there is no sign of a trout so I drift beside Inishmore island (Gildea's) amongst the rushes, haunt of water rails, grebes and numerous broods of mallards. A pair of angry Canada geese shepherd chicks through the grazing sheep as we pull close to the shore. Almost imperceptibly the breeze drops, it suddenly feels warmer, curly bums (buzzers) and sedges begin to hatch in the pink afterglow of the setting sun. It doesn't take long before the first trout breaks the surface and even quicker for my old dad to tie on a cast with his favourite Shipman's buzzers, this is what we've been waiting for!

The scene is now set as buzzers and sedge flies hover over the gently drifting boat, a huge green peter sedge furrows across the water's surface toward the reedbed and the surface of the lough is broken here and there by rising trout. I quietly guide the drift along the rushy shoreline while dad is perched like a heron ready to cast. At the edge of the ripple a trout works quietly toward us sipping down buzzers, the cast goes out well ahead of it and soon a bulging take is met with a strike and the old man is into a fish.

### ***A big head comes up and engulfs the point fly***

The scene is repeated three times, then as the last of the sun's rays glow on the horizon a big fish slurps down a green peter fly behind the boat and I throw my elk hair sedge out into the half light of the summer evening. A big head comes up and engulfs the point fly, I tighten and the water explodes then the trout bolts for the deep water and I hand dad the rod and take the oars to get out of the shallows. The reel sings as line peels off, then the



*Happier times when Dad won the Mallusk club competition as club chairman. No mean feat in his seventieth year.*

trout sounds deep and the rod is hooped over as dad holds on in the darkness and I stand waiting with the net.

I can hear several trout rising around the boat as dad battles his adversary, a big moon starts to climb in the sky and eventually the beaten trout comes up from the depths and I slide the net under him. We put the torch on him, a beautiful leopard spotted wild trout well over three pounds weight, gleaming in the net. With trembling hands dad removes the hook and I slide our fish into the water until he regains his strength then suddenly with a flick of his tail and a splash of spray he's gone back into the dark depths, leaving us with great memories.

I spark up the engine and head for Finnian's, but as we cross the peninsula a hand on my shoulder signals me to cut the engine. Dad wants a few moments to take in the atmosphere of this sacred place once more. Baden-Powell's mansion stands bathed in the moonlight, the lough surface glitters silver, the only sounds are the sheep on the hillsides and waterfowl, not a car for miles. The smell of wild mint, bog myrtle and peat from the fire hangs heavy in the warm summer air.

I hand dad a hip flask from my fishing bag, his favourite Black Bush and open a box of Hamlet cigars. A fox calls from the ruins of the old abbey, the sound of trout rising to sedges carries across the water in the still air, it's peaceful and remote, a magical experience. We laugh and chat, talk about the evening's sport and he recounts his old scouting memories, his hearty laughter rings out over the water in the dark stillness of the night. Many of his old scouting friends have long gone now, passed to the campsite in the sky.

Eventually the light from Finnian's farmhouse beckons, I take the oars and we cross the bay under the light of the moon and stars. The banter stops and though it's been a great experience it's also tinged with sadness because we've both just realised that this is the last time my old man will travel this way. The row back is a time for reflection, my heart is breaking and I know his is too. When we get to the shore I lift the outboard off and load the car. Small waves gently lap the boats as dad stands on the jetty looking out over the moonlit Lough Arrow. 'It's everything you said it would be', he says, 'a sacred place indeed.'

That was the last fishing trip my dad

had apart from to his beloved Boghill Dam at home, as the illness that he endured for so many years eventually caught up with him. Not long after, as he lay on his bed in the Hospice, one of the things that sustained him through the pain was the memory of our times on the water, beautiful tide fresh silver salmon from the Ballisodare, the five pound competition winning trout from Lough Sheelin when he was Chairman of the club in his seventieth year and of course the leopard spotted trout caught on Lough Arrow. Dad and I didn't always get on the best, a good dose of Ulster Scots blood ensured he'd never be accused of being easy-going, though he was a good man who supported church, charities and the community. At least the love of angling allowed us time to be out together, I count myself lucky to have had those experiences.

That's what angling does, it draws together friends from all backgrounds and provides memories that last a lifetime. Sometimes we don't appreciate



*As the last rays of the sun disappeared buzzers and sedge flies hatched in profusion.*

the things we have until it's too late, this Covid pandemic should have given us a time to take stock, an opportunity to reflect on how we treat the world we live in, our wild places, our heritage and our fellow men. These last few years working in the hospital has taught me that only three things matter when we

come to the last cast - our memories, faith and love. When we finally get through the pandemic perhaps we can bear these things in mind, strive to protect our special places, appreciate our time together and in the words of Dame Vera Lynn, 'remember to be kind to one another.'

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Hawke and Deben & Weaver Scopes, Realtree clothing and much much more in stock.

# Inland Fisheries Ireland Protection Officers coming to the forefront during Covid19



Iascach Intíre Éireann  
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Incidents of poaching have seen an increase since the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic. Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) protection staff around the country have reported an upsurge in activity in all River Basin Districts. Initially during lockdown, Inland Fisheries Ireland had to restrict patrols, however staff continued to respond to known threats and intelligence. IFI protection staff are now fully back at work however staff are still restricted to one person per vehicle to ensure Covid19 protocols are adhered to, staff have adapted to this and have been using a selection of vehicles including, bicycles, quads, kayaks and boats as well as cars when they are out on patrols. Another factor that may have brought about an increase in poaching incidents could have been that some poachers may have been

out of work during the crisis and this may have resulted in them having more time on their hands.

Nationally a total of 91 nets, measuring 5,300 metres have been seized to July 2020 since the beginning of the year. Inland Fisheries Ireland's fisheries protection officers boarded a fishing boat off the Cork coast and seized 98kg of salmon and 256m of illegal net. The seizure was secured on Monday the 13th of July 2020 by Inland Fisheries Ireland staff based in the Cork district of the South



*Monofilament Net seized at Inisdooney Island in late May.*



*27 untagged salmon seized from a vehicle in West Donegal in early July.*

Western River Basin District. Unfortunately similar seizures have taken place around the country recently.

Since the beginning of this year Protection Officers in the SWRBD have seized 50% more nets than they had seized in the whole of 2019. The selling of illegal wild salmon is a lucrative trade and is damaging our already at risk salmon stocks. Illegal nets are being staked in estuaries at the mouths of rivers and catching migrating salmon that are trying to return to their home river to spawn. It is important that these salmon are able to reach their home river because it is the peak of the salmon run, in which wild salmon return to

the coast to spawn and populate the rivers for the future.

Fishery managers are reporting good numbers of salmon returning at present with headlines telling of best numbers in years and anglers having great success. Salmon anglers are encouraged to choose catch, photo and release - #cprsavefish to ensure the greatest numbers of fish reach the spawning grounds in 2020.

IFI wishes to highlight the importance of protecting migrating salmon and sea trout stocks against illegal fishing activity. IFI appeals to the public to report any instances of suspected illegal activity, in particular sales of wild salmon that are not carrying a plastic gill tag - the value of prompt and accurate information from stakeholders cannot be overstated. Information can be passed directly onto local Inland Fisheries Ireland staff or by phoning our confidential hotline number on 1890 34 74 24 or 1890 FISH 24.

### **Salmon Licences**

Inland Fisheries Ireland have made salmon licences and permits

available from the online shop. Permits may now be purchased for all of IFI's owned fisheries in Donegal, the Midlands fisheries and in the South West. After purchase the licence will be sent directly to the buyer's phone or computer where they can be printed off. Tags will follow in the post and anglers can fish Catch and Release immediately while waiting for the tags to arrive. Salmon and sea trout anglers must be in possession of a salmon and sea trout licence before fishing. When an online licence is purchased it is now the responsibility of the buyer to download and print their own licence and logbook. Please allow up to four working days for tags to be posted (where applicable). Anglers are advised to order on time to ensure they receive tags if they want to harvest a fish. Anglers are reminded that they must return their completed logbook and unused tags to Inland Fisheries Ireland within 7 days of the licence expiry and no later than the 19th October of the relevant year. For more information and to purchase a salmon licence from the



*Participant with their catch of the day.*

online shop please visit:  
<https://store.fishinginireland.info/>

### **Education and Outreach**

Inland Fisheries Ireland Education and Outreach team have started back working with groups educating young people with IFI's Education and Outreach "Go Fishing" programme. One of the first groups



*Participants at the Summer camp with their certificates of completion.*

back was the Waterford School Completion Programme, this programme works with vulnerable young people who without such intensive supports would be at risk of disengaging from education. The Waterford School Completion Programme Retention Plan has produced fantastic results with numbers now remaining in school in the 90% mark. The after school, holidays and out of school provision like this Summer Camp with IFI's Education and Outreach Officers has a huge role to play the programme. In particular outdoor activities in the summer camp like angling to enable the young people to engage with a variety of activities that may be more suited to them.

This particular event was held on Thursday the 30th of July 2020 at Ballyshunock Lake with a group of seven young people from primary school 5th/6th classes who find attending and participating in school life difficult. The aim of the day was

to give the youngsters an enjoyable experience and a chance to develop important skills to help them continue attending school. The Waterford & District Coarse Angling Club helped support the event with Der Casey and Dave Norbury providing Coaching.

IFI Education and Outreach Coordinators inform participants on Covid-19 protocols, H&S, biodiversity, biosecurity and the benefits of angling. They also help organise, a suitable venue, qualified coaches and provide equipment including PPE gear, fishing gear and provide certificates upon completion.

### **Water Safety Guidelines**

Inland Fisheries Ireland is reminding anglers to exercise great care for their own safety and that of angling partners. While wearing a life jacket on a boat is mandatory Inland Fisheries Ireland would advise anglers to wear one when on or near water. Anglers are asked to

follow some simple safety tips when going fishing:

- Wear a life jacket
- Follow advice on warning signs, permits and notices
- Don't take any risks when wading or fishing from boat, shore or bank
- Check the weather forecast and tide tables before you go
- Take time to observe weather, water and tide conditions while fishing
- Fish with a partner/buddy or let someone know where you're going
- Take a fully charged mobile phone in a waterproof case/bag
- Wear appropriate clothing and footwear

### **Angling Reports**

If you have a recent fishing experience or excursion you want to share on the Angling Ireland website and in the Irish Angling Update weekly e-zine, email your report and photos to [reports@fisheriesireland.ie](mailto:reports@fisheriesireland.ie)



*Please remember to wear a life jacket when on or near water.*

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# Albert Titterington pays tribute to Willy Darragh – international angler, successful lobbyist and protestor, promoter of angling to the young and now NHS champion!



*A big thank you from the NHS to the angling community.*

Few within the angling community in the UK, Ireland and further afield will have missed the facebook fundraising phenomenon for the NHS by Willy Darragh and his team – nearly £75,000 raised and used to purchase PPE for organisations all over the UK.

Willy Darragh is passionate about angling which he was first introduced to on the Moyola as a child of seven from a non angling family living in Magherafelt. That introduction started a lifelong dedicated to enjoying, promoting and defending angling.

Today, as a flooring contractor living with his wife Caroline and four children he has many interests including sponsoring his son's football team through the 'football coaching for Christ' movement, but angling still dominates most of his spare time. He fishes all over Ireland, particularly the Carnroe and Maine, but also in Scotland and Argentina. His regular fishing partners include Bobby Bryans, Sammy Glenn, Paul Smith, Stevie Munn, Mark Tierney and John Richardson. He was an active member of the Lough Neagh Dollaghan Trust.

I first met Willy when we helped sponsor the very energetic and highly effective No Salmon Netting (NSN) group which ultimately lobbied successfully for the 'buy out' of the salmon netting licences which were threatening fish stocks on our rivers. Then when there were proposals to build off shore salmon farms, Willy and the team gave their support to No Salmon Farms NSF and I remember meeting up with them one morning early in Galway to march and protest against the proposal. Once again the determination of Willy, his friends and



*Willy and the team were part of the successful protest in Galway.*



*Introducing the young to angling at the Game Fair at Shane Castle.*

the angling community ‘saw off’ this threat.

When I saw the enthusiasm of Willy and his friends, I suggested they might like to get involved in the children’s fishing attraction I hoped to launch at the Game Fair where, with the support of DAERA’s fisheries division, we put in place a children’s put and take fishery. With their renowned enthusiasm and organisational skills they quickly put in place something that not only is one of the family highlights of the fair, but one that has got many children literally ‘hooked on angling’. With their friends from APGAI Ireland who provide coaching and instruction in fly tying and casting they have created a truly ‘immersive angling experience’ for the young at the Game Fair.

We were delighted to award Willy an Irish Country Sports and Country Life Magazine ‘Country Sports Lifetime Commitment Award’ for his work at the fair and his lobbying work on saving salmon stocks.

When the Covid 19 Pandemic struck, Willy, like many country sports enthusiasts, wished to do what he could to help and with his huge network of friends in the angling community he reacted to a suggestion from Sam Glenn, whose daughter was a Covid nurse, that ‘they should sell a few flies’ for NHS funds, Bobby Bryans came on board with a rod to auction and Paul Smith joined in and started to Tie flies – hundreds of them! From that basic idea the ambition grew to organise a series of fund raising ballots to purchase PPE for

anywhere in the UK that needed it.

What started off as a modest idea within his group of friends ‘took off’ in an unimaginable way with a huge number of offers of prizes and a real enthusiasm amongst the fishing community to donate to help ‘their NHS’.

Willie was very insistent that while his name ‘was on the ballots’ the success of the project was down to a large number of dedicated helpers including his wife, Bobby Bryans, Sammy Glenn, Paul Smith, Don Green and really too many others to mention.

He was also very keen to pay tribute to the all of the people purchasing ballot

tickets, including people like Jamie Kilgannon and Mike Balfour, who ‘invested’ heavily, with a special mention for Paul Wilson who not only purchased, but also put up some very expensive prizes.

Praise too for all of the people who put up prizes including Andy Hind, Mark Patterson, Gordon Simm, Dawn Grieve from Loop Tackle and Lord Thurso from Ulbster Estates.

From all at the Great Game Fairs of Ireland and on behalf of the whole country sports community we say a huge well done to Willy and his team, who through their selfless actions will have helped save so many lives.



*The core team with some of the fruits of their fishing: Willy, Sam, Paul and Bobby.*



*Wish you were here?*

Irish Country Sports and Country Life has been finding out about one of the most idyllic places to stay: Kingfisher Lodge, a luxury self-catering house with something for the country-lover all year round.

Imagine island living, opening your door and walking down to your own jetty on Lough Erne. Imagine fishing in calm waters, occasionally distracted by the rich tapestry of landscape, waterscape and so much wildlife. Imagine resting up by the stove in a beautifully appointed house that sleeps eight to ten people, enjoying all the luxury of four-star self-catering accommodation. This is a perfect place for family holidays, a cosy haven for fishing trips and shoot days in Fermanagh. This, and more, is Kingfisher Lodge on Inishkeeragh island, second home to Jenny and Dougie Crozier, but also your home for the perfect staycation.

“We really want to make sure guests have an extra special time,” says Jenny. “Of course, there is the beauty of the place and all that it offers, but we aim to match that with a luxury home and lots of little extras.”



A perfect example of this is the welcome basket Dougie prepares for every guest. Expect free range eggs, local cheeses and a bottle of Prosecco or wine, just waiting to be opened and

enjoyed. All this, of course, on top of the expected items, such as tea, coffee, sugar and so on.

## ON THE MAP

Connected by road bridges, Innishkeeren island lies off the western shore of Lough Erne, leading on to Boa Island. Travelling across Boa Island, it is just over eight miles (about 12 minutes' drive) to Kesh and half an hour from Enniskillen (22 miles away). Travelling west in the other direction, the beautiful village of Belleek is nine miles away (15 minutes by car) and, from there it is just five more miles to Ballyshannon, bringing you to the Atlantic coast and an array of beaches, like the surf heaven of Rossknolagh.



## INSIDE AND OUT

It's a strong possibility that, once arriving at Kingfisher Lodge you won't really be tempted to leave! Luxuriously appointed throughout, the ground floor is arranged in a split-level open-plan design with spectacular views over Lough Erne. The kitchen is excellently fitted and equipped, with dishwasher, washing machine and tumble dryer in addition to cooker, microwave and fully stocked kitchen cupboards.

The lounge enjoys views over the Lough, leather seating and a cosy wood burning stove for chilly evenings in. Entertainment for such evenings is second to none, with a freeview and Netflix enabled flat screen television, a DVD player, games console and, of course, WiFi. Naturally, the logs for the fire are supplied, as well as a range of boardgames and reading material.

Upstairs, there are four large bedrooms. The 'master bedroom' and the second bedroom both enjoy lake views and the luxury bathroom and en-suite showers all benefit from a pressure water system ensuring powerful showers on demand. The bedrooms are all well-sized but feature a range of configurations that make Kingfisher Lodge perfect for family holidays and for sporting outings such as fishing, shooting days or golf.

There is parking on site and a private garden stretching down to the lough shore where your private jetty just begs a tight line, a fishing boat (available to rent) or, if you're in the mood for it, a plunge in for an energising swim (or perhaps just simply dangling your feet over the edge and contemplating the view).

## SPORTING NATURE

For countrysports enthusiasts, Kingfisher Lodge makes a perfect base. The world-renowned coarse fishing available on Lough Erne needs no introduction. Roach, perch, bream, rudd and eels abound, and the reedy shores of Lough Erne hold stocks of heavyweight pike. As local fishermen know, the trout and salmon fishing is excellent too and, staying right on the shore means you can easily cast a line any time of the day or night.

Equally, while Jenny reports that she has not hosted any shooting parties yet, the Lodge would transform a day on one of the various estates and shoots into a wonderful weekend experience. Imagine a day on the lakeside, an early start for a

day's shooting and 'home' in no time to an evening of reliving it all with your fellow guests.

For county lovers, one of the special attractions of staying at Kingfisher Lodge is the sheer abundance of wildlife to be spotted, on the wing, in the water and on the ground. "There's a resident sea otter on the bank and, if you're lucky you can watch it fishing," says Jenny. "You'll also see the swans in the garden and the island and lough is home to Canadian geese, a heron, gannets and other birdlife. You may also spot deer as you wander around."

## IN EASY REACH

However, while Innishkeeragh may be an island paradise, it's not too far from local attractions and hospitality. Belleek Pottery, Crom Estate, Castle Coole, the Cuilcagh Boardwalk Trail and Marble Arch Caves are all within easy reach. For eating out, the closest venue is Lusty Beg Island but it is not far to Enniskillen town with a range of restaurants, such as 28 Darling Street, Blakes of the Hollow, Dolakis and Francos. Heading west, there is Restaurant McNeen in Blacklion and Smugglers Creek in Rosstown.

*So, back to the beginning. Wish you were here?*



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# 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.

## PROGRESS ON 2020 PLAN FOR SALMON CONSERVATION DESPITE PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

Much has changed since our last issue of this magazine but thankfully Mother Nature continues to allow the seasons to advance and with them the wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout run the rivers as the floods pave their way for them to return to their spawning grounds.

Thankfully, although later than usual due to the dry Spring, some remarkable numbers have shown up on most west of Ireland rivers which have given great encouragement to the angler who so looked forward to a bit of social distancing on our waters this season.

The opening lines of our last column stated “Further to a recent AGM, it was agreed to canvass all political parties with our own manifesto for the new government to consider under the following five headings. We thank all candidates, many who are now elected, for their support and encouragement when we lobbied them in recent times. We look forward to progressing the FISSTA Plan with whoever is charged with the responsibility for our wild salmon and sea-trout in the near future.”

At that time we were not aware of who would form a government, but we were delighted that our hard lobbying work led by our Chairman Paul Lawton had resulted in some very strong



*The Salmon Leap on the Glen River.*

support from the various candidates who have now been elected to Dail Eireann for their respective parties.

Sadly, we failed to get only one political party to declare in their manifesto on the salmon conservation issue, but then Eamon Ryan TD and leader of the Green Party has from the outset of his political career been a stalwart for our wild Atlantic salmon. Many will remember his successful bridges campaign of 2005 which encouraged other political parties to introduce the drift-netting ban.

Our five point plan for 2020 season is still the same.

1. PROTECTION OF OUR WILD ATLANTIC SALMON

(a) IN NORTH ATLANTIC FEEDING GROUNDS

- (b) IN THE NATAL RIVERS
2. END OPEN SEA NETCAGE SALMON FARMING IN IRELAND
  3. END GWEEBARRA & OTHER RIVER TAKEOVERS BY IFI
  4. RESTORE NIFF MEETINGS – MINISTER TO OVERSEE IFI PROGRESS.
  5. REVIEW SCOTTISH STRUCTURE FOR ALL ISLAND ANGLING PLAN

Our lobbying success record has always been poor throughout the tenure of the past two administrations. The hard message from us to Fine Gael / Labour government of 2011 and the FF

supported FG government of 2016 -20 fell on deaf ears until once again the Green Party gave us all an unambiguous assurance in their manifesto last January which read: “The Green Party will support an end to the licensing of offshore salmon farming” - no 6 of the 10 green party manifesto principles.

So, after 25 years of campaigning for our wild salmon habitat to be protected, we welcome this great news of a new government that will end this marine environmental damage at a time when all our wild Atlantic salmon stocks continue to head south below the Conservation Limit.

We shall continue to advise and assist the new Minister Eamon Ryan TD and the new Food Commissioner in their implementation of the new guidelines to eradicate pollution and pesticides from the marine environment that contaminate our food.

We shall also seek to convince Marine Minister Dara Colleary TD from Ballina – the Salmon Capital of Ireland, to now do something to support the king of fish that keeps generating valuable tourism income not just for Mayo but for the entire 300 rivers of our island of Ireland.

### **OBJECTION TO SALMON FARMING & SEAFOOD DEVELOPMENT AT KILKIERAN**

FISSTA have objected once again, to the chosen location of the proposed Udaras na Gaeltachta backed development application 20/683. It is a hastily constructed and poorly thought out proposal that ignores what any state body should have learnt over the many years of their failures and environmental disasters in salmon farming that have eroded the ecological integrity of these sites.

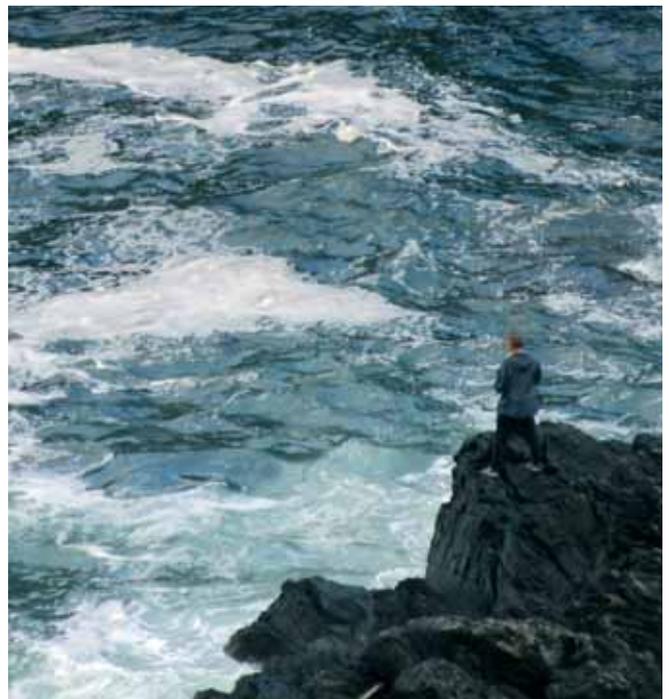
Everybody who is monitoring this application knows and many question the need for Udaras to compete and develop Parc na Mara when another state agency with a brief for scientific research, Foras na Mara, have already established a similar research centre at Lehanagh Pool in Conamara.

Apparently a new breed of genetic salmon are being grown at this site alongside scallops and seaweed species to experiment at unknown cost to our salmonid and shellfish species. The use and continued research trials using IMTA – Integrated Multi – Trophic Aquaculture which is based on the concept of the food chain that where waste by-products from the

salmon rearing (unused toxic pellets and salmon digestates) provides food for the species such as shellfish and seaweed that can be filtered from the waters.

This is yet another admission that the salmon farming industry produces huge unsustainable waste before they admit the even greater problem of massive sea lice numbers being created that damage the wild migrating smolt on their way to the north Atlantic feeding grounds.

For this reason alone, we appealed to Galway County Council to reject this application as the Foras na Mara research project is already operating in Lehanagh Pool in Conamara and



*Rough conditions for this Lug na Druin angler.*

Keywater Fisheries IMTA site in Sligo in collaboration with other marine sites of other international partners throughout EU, Turkey and China which EU funding has been granted under the Horizon 2020 project which we have consistently objected to under grant agreement No 774109. The full text of our objection is published on our facebook page.

We call on new Green Party Minister for the Gaeltacht Catherine Martin to advise Udaras na Gaeltachta to withdraw this application as it now is against the new Government policy to protect the wild Atlantic salmon.



*Dublin fly fisherman Nicky Penco visited the salmon waters of Co Donegal during perfect conditions.*



## Be Warned!

A cursory glance at a map of Ireland, will show a country liberally speckled with ancient earthworks and ring forts. We are told by archaeologists, that these, 'raths', were defensive structures built by our Neolithic ancestors, to guard against attack. Country people however, have their own, less academic explanation; believing instead, that these mounds are the haunt of the Aos Si, or faery folk; a malevolent and vengeful race, far more ancient than mankind, and one not to be disturbed at any cost. Would you dare to build on the site of an old rath? One man did, and this is his story.

Michael Mahon was a self made man, who had accrued bewildering wealth in the construction industry, during Ireland's brief economic boom in the 1990s. Mahon hadn't so much welcomed the Celtic Tiger, as had it stuffed and mounted!

Bored by the confines of Dublin, and keen to build a property befitting his new found status, Mahon bought eighty acres of land near the Slieve Bloom mountains. Gaining planning permission

had been a simple task, as the acreage was two miles from the nearest village and overlooked by no one. There was only one other long abandoned house, and there had been no family descendants to ever claim it.

The Inspection of the land proved that the finest view of the mountains was to be gained from the site of an old and much overgrown ring fort. This, Mahon determined, would be the location of his new house, and connections within the planning department, meant that any objections to building on archaeological grounds, were soon quashed. Clearing of the site commenced in the spring of the year.

All building works encounter their share of problems, but the bulldozing of the old rath was a source of considerable frustration to Michael Mahon. Local contractors, engaged to carry out the work, simply failed to appear once they learned exactly what was entailed. An endless list of excuses was offered over the telephone, leading finally, to Mahon bringing in his own plant and workers from Dublin. City men had no such

qualms about levelling the ring fort, but even so, problems abounded. A newly serviced JCB refused utterly to start, the earth moving lorry broke a prop shaft, and after breaching the outer wall of the rath, the site's only qualified bulldozer driver, was taken ill with a blinding migraine. This malady lasted for days, which was thought strange for a man who had never suffered a headache in his life.

Ultimately, Mahon himself was forced to operate the machine; something he hadn't done since he was a youth working for his father. The rath, beneath its mantle of blackthorn and bramble, was proving to be remarkably obstinate for a simple, earth ringed bank. The bulldozer's caterpillar tracks slipped and spun in the face of its resistance, as Mahon applied all the power the machine's engine would permit. More than once, the baffled contractor climbed down from his cab, to investigate the cause of the obstruction, and found his way blocked by nothing but loose earth.

Things continued in a frustrating vane, until late one afternoon work came



*There was only one other house within miles and that had been long abandoned.*

to a complete standstill. Visibly shaken and vowing never to return, labourers and lorry drivers walked off the site, claiming to have 'seen something.' More men had then to be brought in from Dublin to replace the frightened crew.

### ***They had to be hallucinations....hadn't they?***

Determined to make up for lost time, Mahon pushed himself to the limit, working late into the night to get the site cleared and ready for the foundations of the new house. So hard did he work in fact, that he began to hallucinate, what other explanation could there be for seeing things that defied rational explanation?

The 'hallucination' occurred in the small hours of the morning, when Mahon was clearing the last few stubborn yards of the rath. Drunk with fatigue, and desperate to complete the site clearance, the exhausted builder looked up from the controls of the bulldozer, to find standing before him in the machine's headlights, a 'Living devil'!

Shocked awake and thoroughly shaken, Mahon stared at the creature for a full thirty-seconds. Standing upright on cloven hooves, and with hind legs covered in hair, the apparition had the arms and torso of a man, but the head and horns of a billy goat. It appeared to be about 5 feet tall. Bleary with sleep Mahon rubbed his eyes and when he looked again the thing was gone. Hallucination or not, the shaken builder turned off the engine of the bulldozer and made his way off site with indecent haste.

Of course Mahon believed in neither ghosts or spirits, but it is interesting to

note that he never again lingered on site once darkness had fallen. He also made discrete enquiries via the site foreman, as to exactly what the labourers and lorry drivers claimed to have seen. The foreman believed that the men found the place unnerving, indeed several had heard their names called out from within the rath. On entering the ring fort however, they had discovered it to be entirely empty. One labourer working alone had heard whispering over his shoulder and, upon looking up, saw an unexplained horned shadow standing next to his own. He was very shaken indeed, leaving the site without even collecting his tools.

Despite problems both human and mechanical, the property steadily approached completion and by late summer the two storied house with wrought iron gates and sweeping drive was at last finished. The glazier and electrician were the last to leave and both were happy to do so, stating that the site made them feel very uneasy indeed.

As a finishing touch and adding suitable grandeur he thought, Mahon commissioned an engraved brass plaque to be made, bearing the name, 'Rath House.' This was then affixed to one of the stone gate pillars at the bottom of the drive. Before the property lay an unimpaired vista of rush, alder and heather, sweeping all the way to the mountains. The heather when in flower gave the place its name of 'The Red Bog'.

Whilst admiring the view from the property's second floor balcony, Mahon had noticed on several occasions, the figure of a man standing out on the bog observing him. Oddly, Mahon never

seemed to see this person come or go, but always he was standing, returning his gaze. The figure was accompanied by a dog Mahon thought, but at such a distance he couldn't discern what breed.

Gradually summer drifted into autumn and as gold began to tint the leaves of birch and rowan, removal lorries bearing house furnishings arrived from Dublin. Their cargo of sofas, Georgian furniture and tea chests, was disgorged, unpacked and arranged, thus heralding the arrival of Michael Mahon's wife, Angela.

A city girl to her roots, Angela Mahon had protested about the property being built 'out in the sticks,' but her husband was a forceful man and what he wanted he usually got. That the house itself met with Angela's approval cannot be denied, but did it have to be so far from town? And had he not noticed the atmosphere of the place? Oddly oppressive, Angela thought; no matter how much the heating thermostat was adjusted, the house always seemed to have a chill to it. However, the gift of a new Mercedes-Benz, helped persuaded Angela to accept her new home without too much protest.

### ***Some things were harder to explain***

Time passed and the Mahons endeavoured to settle in to Rath House. Every property, even a new build, has its idiosyncrasies. Knocking water pipes and doors that swell or shrink in response to central heating are by no means uncommon. What was harder to explain were doors that locked themselves from the inside, and lights that switched on and off seemingly at will. Rath House had these and more, for

still the central heating was giving problems; more recently however, the entire house had been pervaded by the most awful smell of putrefaction. A plumbing specialist from town had examined the drains in minute detail, but could find no fault or blockage. Nor could he locate the source of the foul odour. It was everywhere and horrified Angela Mahon. A country girl might tolerate such a smell, but one used to the sophistication of the big city and a stranger to manure, found it very hard work indeed.

All of this was bad enough, and might have unsettled the best of us, but what really unnerved Angela Mahon were the voices. Whispering voices, always unintelligible, but there. Whispering in the car as she drove up to the house, with a sound like an autumn wind blowing through dry leaves. Worse yet, the voices that shouted her name, for on several occasions, Angela had been called downstairs, only to find the house quite empty and her husband nowhere to be seen. At first, she had thought it a cruel prank played by Michael, but when it happened while he was away on business in Dublin, she became thoroughly scared. The wicked chuckle

that followed her visible distress was simply terrifying.

A further disturbing characteristic of Rath House, was that objects there seemed to move of their own accord. Loose change, car keys and wallets, placed by Angela on the kitchen table, would vanish, only to be discovered days later in the most unlikely places. Mirrors and certain pictures, too, would be turned to face the wall, and at times Angela would feel someone or something brush past her when standing in the hallway. Turning, she would glimpse a fleeting shadow against the wall, but there was never anybody there. When the light began to fade on a late autumn afternoon, Rath House could be a very unnerving place indeed.

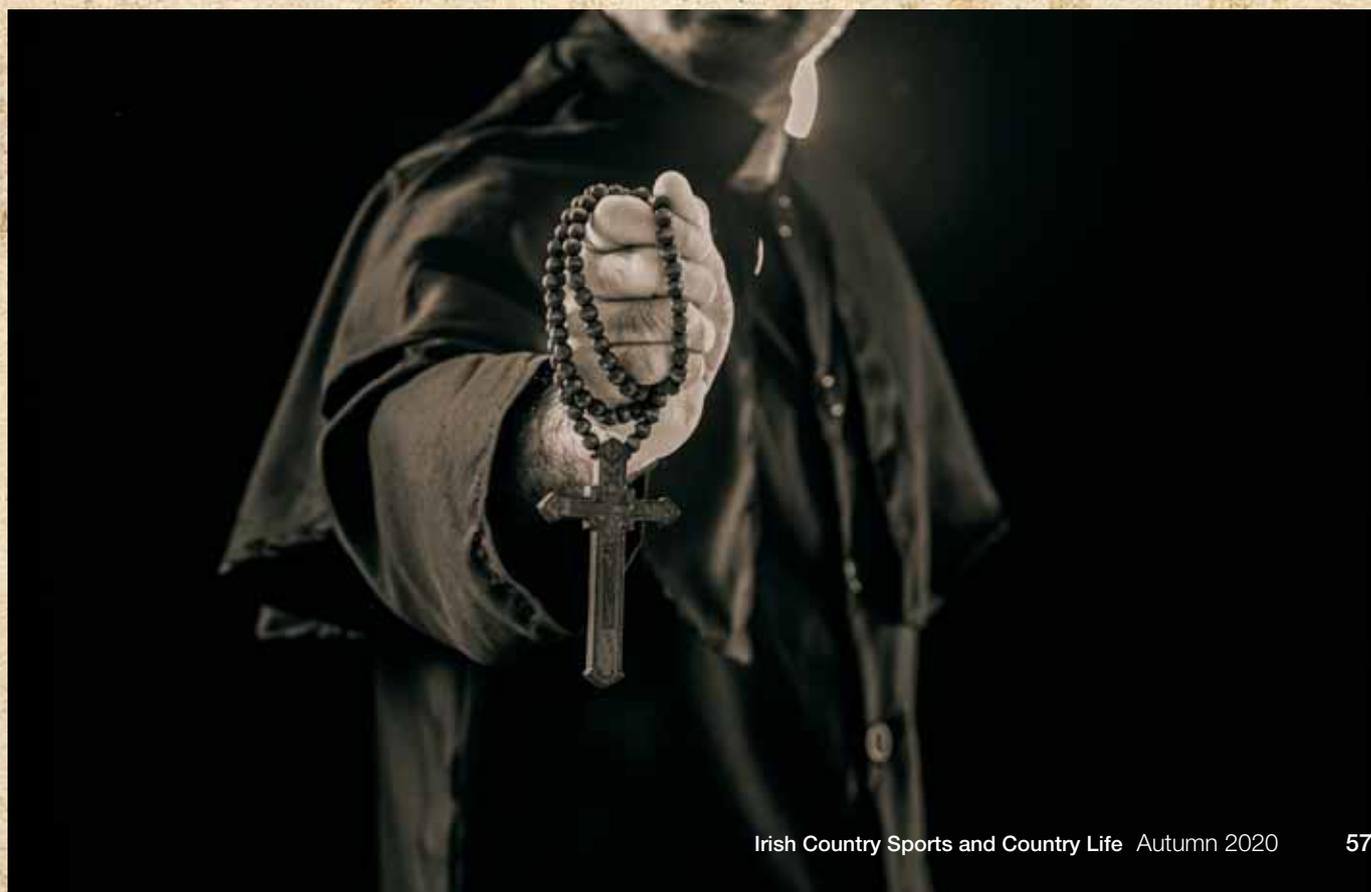
Afraid of appearing to be unhinged, Angela had kept her fears to herself for weeks, finally blurting them out when she felt she could take no more. Michael, in an attitude of denial typical to him, explained away such sounds as, 'Air trapped in the heating system' and 'a new house settling' and suggested that his wife might like to spend some time visiting her sister in the city. What he failed to mention however, was that he too had heard the whispering and had

been called out of the garage by his wife's voice, only to find the driveway and garden quite deserted.

So it was, that Michael Mahon found himself alone in his new built mansion, staring out over the red bog, to where the sun chased shadows across the tawny mountain slopes. Lost in introspection, he had become momentarily unaware of things within his peripheral vision. Then, glancing down, he saw the man and dog, standing just beyond the gates at the bottom of the drive. Mahon could see now that the dog was a type of rough-haired lurcher and the man, dressed in a bleached waxed jacket, bearded and elderly.

Overtaken by an urge to know the man's business, Mahon crossed the landing, ran down the stairs and out through the open front in a matter of seconds. The figure had gone, but glancing right, to where the scrubby birch and alder began to thicken, Mahon saw the old man disappearing into the tangled growth. 'Hey!' Mahon shouted. 'Hey wait!' and ran down the drive and on to the edge of the bog. The old man stopped and turned towards the Mahon, who shouted, 'Wait I want a word with you!'

*With candles now lit, Father Macalister stepped into the circle, and from his bag produced a bronze crucifix.*



With an expression of controlled disinterest the old man stood and waited, as Mahon in city shoes squelched and stumbled across the saturated peatland. He moved as one entirely out of his element, as more than once, his expensive footwear required retrieving from the sucking bog.

### ***Only a fool would build on the site of a faerie fort***

Gasping, and finally standing in front of the old man and his dog, Mahon blurted breathlessly 'What are you doing here?'" 'What am I doing here?' replied the old man. 'What do you mean, what am I doing here?' 'I mean why do you stand out on the bog staring at my house?' countered the peat splattered builder. Raising an eyebrow, the old man replied, 'I stare at your house, because I find it hard to believe, that anyone would be stupid enough to build there.' 'What exactly do you mean by that?', replied Mahon. 'Exactly what I say,' the old man went on. 'I stand and stare and I wonder what kind of special fool, would build on the site of a rath. A faerie fort. No ordinary fool, that's for sure.'

Mahon had spent most of his life on building sites an environment not know for its gentility and had no intention of being called a fool by some scruffy looking vagrant. Glancing down, he noticed that the old man held in one hand, a large, dead hare. It hung by its hind feet from his gnarled grip, and where the lurcher's teeth had lifted the brown fleck, white under fur showed through.

Mahon decided to go on the offensive. 'So you've been poaching have you?' 'Poaching?'" countered the old man. 'Who are you to accuse me of poaching? I have hunted the hares on this bog for sixty-five years, and I'll not be questioned by some fool of a blow-in from Dublin. If I were you, I would concentrate more on my own troubles, because troubles you have got!'

The old fellow went on, 'Did you never stop to wonder, why nobody had ever built on the site of the old rath, where your house now stands. What

with it having such wonderful views. No? Did you think it was just by chance, did you? Well, I'll tell you it wasn't by chance. The old people knew. Local people knew. They feared the old raths, and stayed well clear of them. If a cow or horse wandered into a fort, they wouldn't go after it. It would have to come out of its own accord. And you built there!"

Whatever Michael Mahon had expected of the lone stranger on the bog, it hadn't been this. Although dishevelled in appearance, the old man was undeniably intelligent and articulate.

'That's superstitious nonsense' Mahon replied, his toes going numb inside wet shoes and socks. 'These old forts were built long ago, to keep out attackers, nothing more. They're just defensive structures.' The old man smiled a thin smile; the kind of expression one might hold when faced with a foolish child. 'Oh nonsense is it. Nonsense?' asked the old man 'Let me tell you, these are not defensive structures, and they were not put up to keep somebody out, but to keep something in! These old raths were put up to contain the Aos Sidhe. The people of the mounds. The Tuatha De' Danann. The first inhabitants of this land, who retreated into the otherworld as Ireland was populated by human kind. The old people knew this, they were in touch with the land and they knew that certain places were dangerous, and avoided them. For thousands of years this rath here contained a malevolent and vengeful force, and then you came along with your bulldozers, and released it! That is why I stand and stared at your house, and that's why I call you a fool.'

Michael Mahon shifted awkwardly, his discomfort now being far greater than merely having wet feet. 'Have you heard voices. Whisperings. Seen things?' Mahon stood in silence. 'You have then, said the old man, solemnly. 'I didn't say I had', countered the builder. 'You didn't have to. Your expression spoke volumes. You won't be able to stay here. You know that it won't let you.' 'It?' asked Mahon. 'Yes, it,' the old man almost

spitting out the words. 'It will drive you out. But not before it has destroyed you, for it is powerful and ancient, and bears a terrible grudge against human kind.' Mahon felt like a child in front of a teacher, because in spite of his big city rationality, he knew that the old man was right.

### ***Exorcism could be tried perhaps***

'Couldn't I get a priest in to exorcise the thing?' asked Mahon, scarcely believing what he was saying. 'You could try, but you would need a priest of the old school. It would have to be bell, book and candle, to get rid of the thing that possesses this place, for it won't give up without a fight.' He glanced over to Rath House and its surrounding acres, now fading into the gloom of a November dusk. 'Or You could just leave' offered the old man. 'I'm not leaving; being run out by some spook,' Mahon replied. 'Right then. I think I know of a priest who might be equal to the task. I can contact him on your behalf, if you wish?' the old man's voice now softening a little in tone. Mahon nodded, and with that, the old man turned, and with dog at heel, disappeared into the darkening birchwood. Mahon shouted after him, 'Whats' your name?'" , and a disembodied reply came back, 'O'Driscoll.'

Two days, later a local youth arrived on foot, bearing a hand written note informing Mahon of developments. Clearly Mr Driscoll was not one for e-mail or mobile phones.

The brief message, written in ballpoint pen on a scrap torn from last year's diary, informed Mahon that at 11 a.m on Tuesday next, he would receive a visit from Father Dowd. That was all the note imparted.

Things at Rath House continued in their eerie way. That same evening, Mahon heard footsteps on the stairs, and thinking his wife had returned early from Dublin, shouted out, 'Angela!' His call was met with only chilling silence; or was that wicked laughter he detected from the stairwell?



*Throwing back its horned head, the beast emitted demonic, mocking laughter.*

Twice when shaving in the bathroom, Mahon had glimpsed a fleeting shadow move across the wall behind him. So frightening had things become that he dare not close his eyes even when taking a shower. It seemed as though the entity within the house knew of Mahon's intentions, for paranormal activity had greatly increased since the arrival of the note. A kitchen dresser, displaying rare and expensive porcelain, had been brought crashing down by an invisible hand, whilst simultaneously, all kitchen and bathroom taps had been turned full on.

All of this was bad enough, but Mahon's most terrifying experience by far, occurred the very night before Father Dowd's visit.

Sleep was never easy for the beleaguered builder, as the spirit of the

rath grew bolder with the fading of the light. Lying in bed, Mahon heard the usual knocks and bangs from around the house, but eventually managed to drift off. At some point in the early hours of the morning he awoke to discover the bedclothes on the floor. The temperature in the room had plummeted. The darkness around him seemed to have become almost viscous, like treacle, and to exude a feeling of absolute evil and malevolence. He attempted to turn on the bedside light, but terrifyingly, found himself paralysed. He could not move! Then, slowly, an unseen weight began to steadily increase upon his chest, forcing him down into the bed, and the air from his lungs. Only with the greatest of difficulty could he manage to breathe, gasping for air like a fish thrown up on the riverbank. His mind raced wildly and

his ribcage felt as though it might burst, so great was the force upon it. Then, in utter desperation and close to death, he began to recite the Lord's Prayer.

With an almost inaudible whisper at first, he repeated the words known to him since childhood and as he did so the pressure on his chest gradually began to lessen. He was breathing again and found also that the feeling was slowly returning to his numbed limbs. The air in the room seemed somehow to dilute, as though a great evil were being driven back into its shadowiest corners. Eventually, exhausted, he fell asleep.

Tuesday morning dawned over a mist wreathed bog, as the gloomy November weather matched perfectly Michael Mahon's mood. Exhausted both mentally and physically, he recalled Bill Driscoll's prophecy, that the entity possessing Rath House would, eventually, destroy him. Mahon now felt that one way or another, the end was near.

At a little before 11.00 a.m., the builder heard the sound of a car, making its laboured way along the bog road leading up to the house. On legs made leaden by lack of sleep, Mahon made his way to the front door, and then down the drive, ready to welcome Father Dowd. The sight that greeted Mahon did not immediately instil confidence. In fact quite the reverse; for if the builder was expecting to greet some kind of spiritual colossus, he was to be disappointed.

There, parked before the wrought iron gates, was a Morris Minor - a vehicle Mahon had thought now entirely resigned to motor museums - out of which stepped a tiny old man with snow white hair, ecclesiastical dark suit and dog collar. 'Mr Mahon?' enquired the old man. 'Yes. You must be Father Dowd?' 'That's correct. I have come in response to Mr Driscoll's communication,' the old priest replied. 'You are the man brave enough to build on the site of the old rath?' This was more a statement than a question, to which Mahon replied, 'Fool enough, Father, it now seems.' The priest met his gaze with clear blue eyes, and spoke. The old gods were largely driven out by

the early church, but they didn't vanish all together. They retreated to the sanctuary of these old raths and forts, with their tangles of whitethorn and bramble and the local people, the country people, knew to leave them alone. You being a city man, wouldn't have known, so don't judge yourself too harshly.' With that, he took from the aged car a black leather bag of matching vintage and said, 'Very well. Let us see what can be done here. Lead the way.'

Mahon lead the old priest in through the front door of the house and into the kitchen, where he explained about the incident with the taps and the dresser. Father Macalister placed his bag on the floor, and stood in silence, eyes closed for a long moment. When he spoke it was in hushed tones, as though he didn't want someone, or something, to hear. 'This is an unquiet place Mr Mahon. An unquiet place. And there is something here that wants you gone!' The house was deathly still, as though even its very timbers were holding their breath. The old priest continued, 'You have unwittingly trespassed upon the domain of something very ancient and very powerful. It has dwelt in this place since the dawn of creation and it will not leave here without a fight. Are you prepared to fight Mr Mahon?' asked the old priest. If just a year ago, someone had told the Dublin builder that he would have been having this conversation, he would have thought them insane; and yet here he was. 'It seems Father, that I have little choice, either this spirit is driven out, or I am!'

### ***Mahon and the cleric took to the stairs as the temperature dropped noticeably***

As Mahon finished this sentence, there came from upstairs the sound of a heavy wardrobe being toppled over; the impact of which reverberated over their very heads! The old priest picked up his bag and said, 'Quickly now. Show me the room above us.' Mahon and the cleric took to the stairs, and as they ascended, both felt the temperature fall dramatically. When entered, the master

bedroom was a scene of chaos, for not only had the wardrobe been turned over and its contents shredded, but both dressing table mirrors had been smashed to pieces. Mahon stared in disbelief at the bedroom windows, as before his eyes frost began to form on the inside of the glass.

'Oh my God!' uttered the shaken builder in little more than a hoarse whisper. 'Quite the reverse I'm afraid' replied Father Dowd. 'We are dealing here with an ancient evil and you must be steadfast Mr Mahon. Now quickly, stand in the middle of the room.' Scarcely believing what was happening, Mahon did as instructed, as the old priest took from his bag a leather pouch containing salt. This he scattered in a circle of roughly six foot in diameter, with Michael Mahon at its centre. 'Now, under no circumstances Mr Mahon, must you leave this circle. Do you understand?', asked the priest. Mahon nodded his head in dumb acquiesce. Father Dowd again delved into his bag, this time removing from it five candles and an aged book bound in tattered red leather.

The old priest placed a candle at regular intervals around the circle, then passing Mahon a box of matches instructed him to light them. Mahon's hands were shaking so badly, that only with supreme effort, did he manage to follow the old priest's instructions. With candles now lit, Father Macalister stepped into the circle, and from his bag produced a bronze crucifix. This he handed to Michael Mahon saying, 'Now hold this.' Father Dowd then began to read aloud from its Latin text. Mahon, glancing toward the windows, saw that they were now entirely obscured by frost and as a rising tide of darkness lapped around them, the old priest's voice rose steadily in volume.

Slowly, and almost imperceptibly at first, a twisting, spiralling column of green mist began to form, in the furthest corner of the bedroom. Transfixed, the builder stared, whilst all the time Father Macalister read aloud in Latin text; the old man seeming to grow

in strength and stature, as within the circle of scattered salt he held back the surrounding darkness.

The column of mist, swaying back and forth, began to take solid form, as gripping the bronze crucifix to his chest, Michael Mahon recognised the thing he had glimpsed from the seat of the bulldozer. Throwing back its horned head, the beast emitted demonic, mocking laughter. On cloven hooves, it strode toward the pair within the circle. Recoiling, Mahon stumble backwards, knocking over one of the lighted candles and dropping the crucifix. 'Stand firm Mr Mahon!' shouted the old priest, but gripped by uncontrollable terror the builder stepped out of the circle and fled for the doorway. As if by an invisible hand the bedroom door was slammed shut before him and no amount of wrenching at the handle would make it open. He was trapped! Turning, Mahon saw that the fallen candle had set light to the shredded clothes strewn across the floor. Already, tongues of flame had begun to climb the bedroom curtains. In the midst of this growing conflagration stood Father Dowd, still reading from the Latin text, the horned beast summoned from the depths of the otherworld raged outside the circle of salt, trying to find a way in.

In his report, the Chief Fire Officer stated that the blaze that consumed Rath House had probably started in an upstairs bedroom. It was however, difficult to pinpoint the exact cause, as the destruction of the property by fire had been so absolute. In truth, all that remained of the house were its block walls and a handful of charred timbers. Human remains were however, discovered amongst the ashes, along with a melted but still recognisable, bronze crucifix.

What remains of the property will eventually be cleared, but as the place was once the location of an old rath, it is thought that heritage officials advised that it should allowed to return to its former state.

That is of course, unless you would care to submit an offer for the site?



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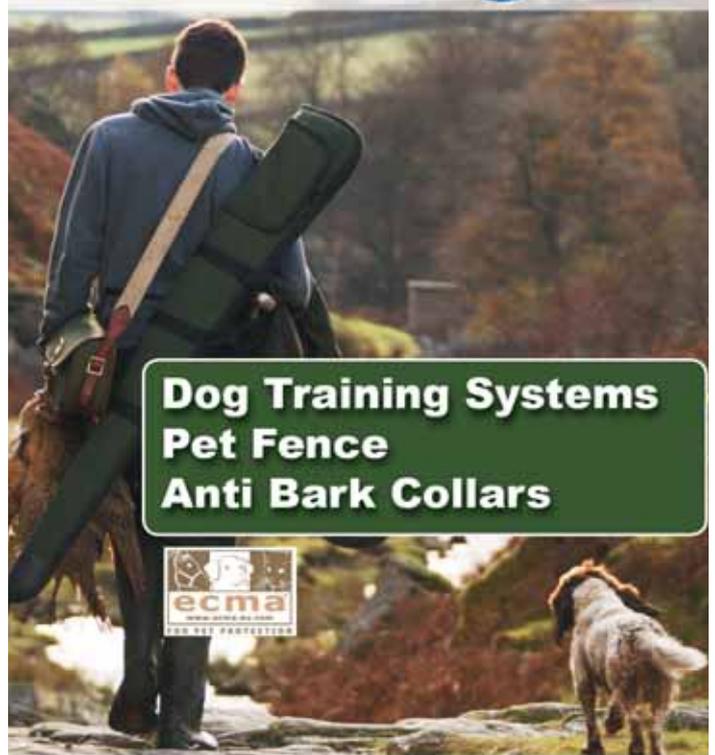
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# The Real Macnab

*Loch Choire Lodge on a wintry day.*

In common with much of the country I find myself with a certain amount of time on my hands at the moment. I have kept a gamebook for many years now and the prospect of being isolated for the next twelve weeks gave me the perfect excuse to start thumbing through some of the old notes – where I came across several references to someone or other ‘Doing a Macnab.’

They all go back to the 1980s when Georgina and I were working on a sporting estate in Sutherland. Loch Choire covered 35,000 acres of mountain and moorland with five miles of salmon river, half a dozen trout lochs, a few acres of forestry and a lodge which has since burnt down. Guests came to Loch Choire for just three reasons: to fish for trout and salmon, to stalk red deer and to shoot grouse. Occasionally – very occasionally – one of them would manage to catch a salmon, stalk a stag and shoot a grouse on the same day, and that is what we call ‘a Macnab.’

The expression comes from a John Buchan novel: *John Macnab*: in which three gentlemen who are bored with life create a fictional persona they call ‘John Macnab’ and issue a challenge to three Highland estates that they will poach a

stag or a salmon from each estate within a certain time frame. The book tells how they set about their enterprise and how each estate tries to foil them. If you are not already familiar with the work I can recommend it as a cracking good read.

The modern version of the Macnab isn’t really true to the original concept. Firstly, there is no poaching involved – at least, I sincerely hope there isn’t – and secondly, grouse didn’t feature at all in the original story. The challenge originally was for ‘John Macnab’ to shoot a stag or catch a salmon without being caught himself. In the modern version the challenge is to do all three things between dawn and dusk on a single day.

These days some estates offer the chance of ‘doing a Macnab’ and will plan the day in advance to give the sportsman the best possible opportunity of achieving the treble. At Loch Choire the guests didn’t generally pick a day with the intention of setting out to do a Macnab: they were more likely to sort of stumble into it.

### ***It didn’t help if the river was fly only***

The hardest part of a Macnab is likely to be catching your salmon. The stags and the grouse would always be

there to be stalked or shot but the salmon was a different matter. Some days you could go to the river and hook a salmon with no trouble at all: other days you could flog the water from dawn to dusk and never get the slightest semblance of interest even when the fish were there in decent numbers. It didn’t help that the river was fly only: no spoons, plugs or spinners were allowed though sometimes the ‘fly’ was a three inch brass tube with a bit of deer hair dressing rather than a traditional Jock Scott, Silver Doctor or Garry Dog.

The stalking day started at 10 a.m. when the stalkers and the guests would meet in the gun room so there was time for the keen fisherman to wander down to the river, either before or after breakfast, and try for a salmon. If he or she succeeded then a Macnab was on – provided they were equally fortunate when it came to stalking their stag. Alternatively, sometimes the stalkers would be back at the lodge by early afternoon with a victim in the Argocat and a stroll down to the river might end up with a salmon on the bank. In either case, with two out of three already in the larder it was only natural for the successful stalker/fisherman to turn their thoughts to the possibility of a grouse and the elusive Macnab. And



*Red deer stag in evening light.*

that is where Georgina and I would come in.

Grouse were not exactly *rara avis* at Loch Choire in those days – in our best year the owners and their guests shot around 350 brace over the season – but you were not exactly tripping over them. All the grouse were shot in the traditional way over pointing dogs. Georgina and I had ‘English’ pointers and Irish setters; our employers (the estate was in joint ownership) both ran

German Shorthaired Pointers. There was some lively debate at times as whether the British or the Continental dogs were more effective, but that is a story for another day. Anyway, generally around late afternoon we would be asked to grab one of the dogs and set off to help John or Fred or William or Georgina to complete his or her Macnab.

The great thing about at Loch Choire was that you didn’t have to go very far

to find a grouse. The Lodge was at the end of the loch between Ben Armine and Ben Klibreck and there was heather moorland right down to the waters edge. We would get one of the pointers out of the kennels while the hopeful Macnabber got a gun and some cartridges and off we would go in search of a grouse or two.

In theory shooting grouse over pointers is not the most challenging of shooting: certainly not when compared with a high pheasant curling in a December gale or a covey of partridges bursting over a hedge and scattering in all directions. Bear in mind though that the man with the gun had already been down to the river to catch a salmon, spent most of the day walking and crawling after a stag and was now in a high state of excitement at the prospect of completing his Macnab while quite possibly feeling the effects in his legs of all that earlier exercise. And now he was having to walk over some moderately rough ground and maybe up a hill while the pointer hunted out a covey for him.

I remember a couple of days in particular. It was late in the season and already the light was fading as we set out on the lower slope of Ben Armine. Charlie the pointer locked on to a single cock grouse, roded in to lift it and the Gun dropped it with his first barrel. So



*About to take the shot.*

far so good: but the grouse hit the ground running having only suffered a broken wing. I was about to send Charlie to pick it when there was another Bang! and the grouse turned its toes up in the heather.

### ***It got an 'old fashioned look'***

The Gun explained that he didn't realise the pointers could retrieve and, as it was getting dark he wanted to make sure of his grouse. I could see his point, though Charlie looked at me a bit old-fashioned until I sent him to pick it. Macnab completed and honour satisfied all round.

Another Macnab was a little more difficult to complete. Stag and salmon were both safely in hand, there was plenty of time left in the day and the Gun – John – was a capable shot. The only problem was that it was blowing half a gale and I was not sure the grouse would sit well enough for him to get within range. Accordingly we set off

along a narrow strip of moor between the river and the track which was as close to being sheltered as we were going to find within walking distance. Charlie was the pointer on duty again and he was soon on point. We walked up to him: John got ready and I clicked Charlie in to lift the birds.

They got up – a small covey as I remember – and John had loosed off two barrels almost before they left the ground. Unfortunately, all he hit was the heather and the covey clawed their way into the air with the gale blowing right into their faces: hung almost stationary for an instant and then whirled away back over our heads as the wind caught them. I cast Charlie off again and we went on.

He had another two or three points and each time the grouse did exactly the same thing: rose into the wind: hung for a moment and then swung back over our heads, and each time John let off two barrels as soon as they rose and missed

every time. By the time they were hanging on the wind and making an easy target the guns was empty and by the time it was reloaded they were a couple of hundred yards away and travelling.

It was all down to adrenaline and the excitement at the prospect of a Macnab: a prospect that was looking less likely at each wasted point. However: the story does end happily, as all stories should, because, just as we were about to run out of ground Charlie pointed a pair of grouse and John finally reined in his enthusiasm to score a right and left, taking them just at the instant when they were starting to swing down the wind. I'm not sure which of us was the more relieved: Me, John or Charlie who finally got a double retrieve.

And that is the story of a couple of Macnabs: nothing like the Macnab in Buchan's book but great sport for all concerned. I'm sure John Buchan would have approved.



*Georgina and pointer watching a grouse away.*

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# Gundog Rescue & Rehoming Dog Show a huge success

The Virtual Gundog show run on facebook by Gundog Rescue and Rehoming , co-ordinated by Sophie Vincent and sponsored by the Great

Game Fairs of Ireland was a major success with a good number of entries in each of the categories.

The categories were:

1. Working Gundog
2. AV Spaniel
3. AV Retriever
4. AV Pointer or Setter



*Overall Winner(and also Retriever Category) Janet Glass.*



*Working Category - Georgia Scott.*



*Pointer Category - Eamon Newland.*



*The winner received a £50 cheque and a unique antique trophy sponsored by the Great Game Fairs of Ireland.*



*Spaniel Category - Joint Winners Sophie Stanley & Gary Conlon*



Please note: This show was part of a test marketing exercise for similar competitions to be staged by THE VIRTUAL

GAME FAIR – ‘the Game Fair you can visit every day’.

For further details see [www.thevirtualgamefair.com](http://www.thevirtualgamefair.com)

# Art & Antiques

Almost six months ago I asked myself a question which was on many people's minds at that time. Was this going to be the end of auctions as we have known them over the years? The answer I would have given you then was an emphatic 'yes' and today my feeling is still in the affirmative. But don't get me wrong I did not mean, in any way, the demise of auctions.

Of course since the insidious epidemic hit us there have been casualties in every walk of commercial life but then again we have been passing through unprecedented times. We have been sailing in what look like un-charted seas and now we are emerging, albeit slowly, from it all there is indeed some light at the end of the tunnel.

But we have been here before, just

not the victim of an influenza-type virus. Auction houses have survived plagues before and they will do so again. And if the form they survive in is different in many respects to what we have been accustomed to, then we will accept it and move on.

Thanks to ever-expanding technology we have been able in recent years to bring the auction house, in fact practically any kind of sales venue, to the living room, the sitting room, the kitchen and probably even the bathroom. So accessible are sales today we, if we really want to, can conduct purchases from the bed or the side of a mountain if that is what we wish.

Sometimes in the recent past we have cursed such technology or depriving us of the age we grew up in. An age when dark, dank auction rooms were the attraction and the possibility of finding

a 'hidden' treasure our goal. Those times have gone and the circumstances we find ourselves in are already speeding up the process of change.

'Necessity is the mother of invention' may be a saying of old but it very pertinent today when applied to auction houses and other sales sources. On-line buying has been the salvation of many wishing to make purchases in order to survive the present situation. It has also been the salvation of those who are almost addicted to sourcing the Internet on a daily and nightly basis looking for that bargain, that 'sleeper' from either the art or the antiques world which has evaded them for so long.

To people like myself, self-quarantining deep in the heart of the countryside, it has been a reason for keeping 'cabin fever' at bay. There are only so many soaps, serials or sagas one



Tadeusz Brzozowski's  
*Mastiff (Cwajnos)*  
€ 190,000 (Whytes)



Jack Butler Yeats' *Rusty Gates*, €120,000 (*Whytes*)

can watch on television in a day that is seemingly longer than usual. But a quick change over to Ebay or Amazon or any other sales source brings almost instant mental relief.

Yes, we have much to appreciate in that respect and hopefully that valuable facility will continue for a long time to come. I believe many new devotees have been drawn to the sales facilities on the internet since the auction houses were forced to close their doors.

I'm not saying for one minute that the Internet totally replaces everything that a sales house has to offer. No, that is not so. For in my book there is nothing to replace the long-loved atmosphere of an auction house, where everyone is a friend until the gavel is raised and where every item is a 'must have,' until it is brought home. But auction houses will be changed as a consequence of what we are going through. Many of them have found a

form of commercial respite through the Internet.

Those who did not join that band at an earlier date will probably feel they should have done so. It is not possible to predict when things will return to normal again if that is possible. But make no mistake about it, many things we loved and admired about auctions, sales etc, will have changed and we too will have to change ourselves to enable us to appreciate the new scene.

I am not forecasting the demise of old, well established auction houses. God forbid. But nothing in life remains forever. There will always be antiques that people want to possess, paintings they want to hang in their homes and novelties and oddities that momentarily catch their attention. Such things will never go away and so long as people have an affection and an affliction for them they will always be for sale. Like everything else affected by our most

serious 21st century plaque auction houses, car boot sales and others will survive too. But just don't expect them to be as they were in the past.

As we come through this dark tunnel, we have experienced a much different world of economics as well. This too will have a serious affect on the things we are going to purchase. It will take some time for the buying temperature of art, antiques and bric-a-bracs to rise again. Of course there will always be Old Masters making millions, period furniture holding its value and china, porcelain and jewellery commanding its proclaimed value.

But I do think it could take five or more years for us to get back, economically that is on the sales scene, on an even keel again. I hope I am wrong. And who knows I probably am. But never forget there will only be a place for auction houses in the future so long as there is a demand from people



Paul Henry *The Bog Road*, €54,000 (Whytes)

who want to buy or sell. That will dictate the future of all sales.

My confidence was restored enormously a few weeks ago when I learned the artist George Hardie who was paid the princely sum of £60 fifty years ago for the album cover of Led Zeppelin's debut album cover had sold its original drawing. And it didn't go for a pittance either.

The tracing of a photo of the 1937 Hindenberg air disaster went for a staggering £260,000 which prompted a Christie's auction house spokesman to say, "It would seem ephemeral things are the objects that collector's value."

To me it just proves that old habits don't die, coronavirus or not. The collectors are still out there. And the auctions will continue, in some form or other, to facilitate them all.

### **AROUND THE SALES**

Many of our sales houses are now back in business, conducting their affairs against a backdrop of masked faces, well sanitised hands and all the necessary health and hygiene restrictions that are needed.

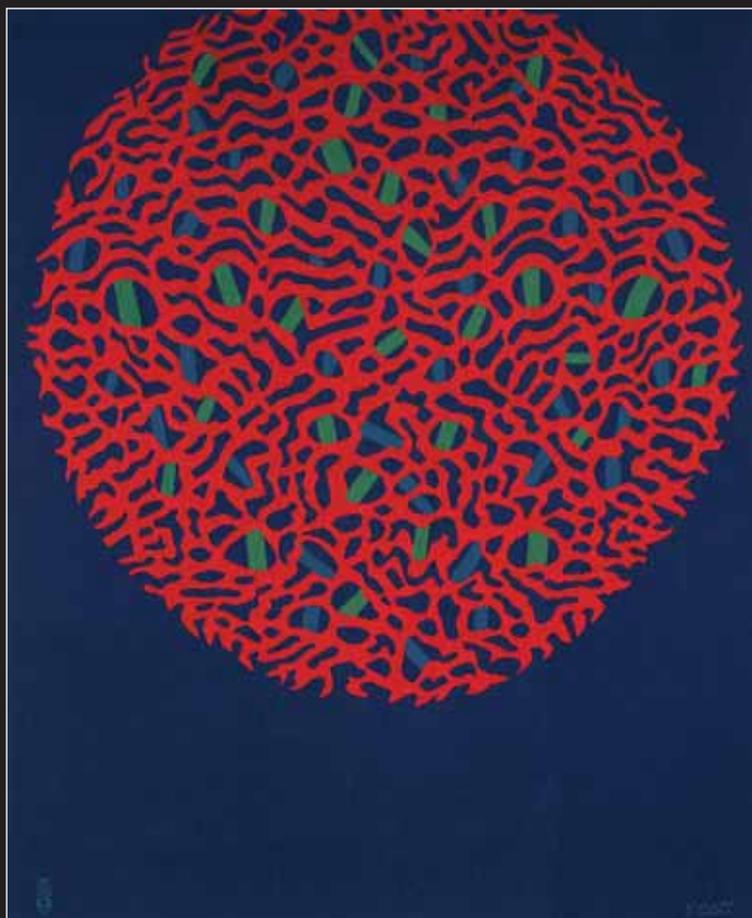
Items are reported to be selling a lot better than expected but one has still to go back a few months to find the gems that made the start of the auction year so promising.

Irish portrait miniatures may not be every art lover's cup of tea. But an exceptional collection which was sold in Cheswick Auctions, London towards the end of March proved there are those who do love miniature works of art.

The Comerford Collection, comprising 121 lots, which took more

than forty years to assemble sold in its entirety for £98,000. It was a blessing it was not split up, as is sometimes done to facilitate sales. In the future when circumstances permit, it will be displayed in the Waterford Museum, having been purchased by an anonymous Irish collector. The lifetime's work of the late John and Pauline Comerford, the collection includes some of the leading Irish miniaturists of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. John Comerford was a descendent of the Irish miniaturist John Comerford (1770-1832).

A spokesperson for the sales house said: "This wonderful collection attracted strong interest from Irish collectors. It was acquired by an Irish private collector who has offered it to be displayed at the Waterford



Patrick Scott HRHA (1921-2014) *Device*, €22,000 (Whytes)

Museum as an important contribution to the heritage of Ireland.” Isn’t it good to see such a fine collection not only remaining in Ireland, but going on display to be enjoyed by a wider audience than it may otherwise have experienced.

In their February paintings and online sale, ADAMS sold an Ion Bitzan mixed media for €5280 while a Daniel Timmers, *Portrait of a Lady* made €2,800 and a Jonathan Wade, pair of oils on panel, sold for €2,000.

A Markey Robinson oil, *Don Quixote* made €1,400, a Robert Ballagh print on canvas €1,100, a Fergus Bourke print on cotton rag paper, €1,100 and a Gerard Dillon abstract, €1,000.

WHYTE’s, despite the inclement weather of the day and the threat of plague, had a fine first major auction of the year attaining sales of over €1million, some 100 room bidders competing with over 300 others on the Internet and telephone.

Highlights included Tadeusz Brzozowski’s *Mastiff* (Cwajnos), sold for €190,000, Jack Butler Yeats’ *Rusty Gates*, €120,000, Paul Henry’s *The Bog Road*, €54,000, Patrick Scott HRHA (1921-2014) *Device*, €22,000 and Donald Teskey’s *Coastal Report II*, €20,000. Overall, 80% of the lots were sold.



Donald Teskey’s *Coastal Report II*, €20,000 (Whytes)



## HUNTING ROUNDUP

### **Around the meets**

The **Iveagh Foxhounds** meet at Tullyrior, near the home of joint master and trainer Sarah Dawson, who was unavoidably absent on racing duties, underlined why huntsman Jack Harris, in his first season here, is enjoying a burgeoning reputation.

Jack had on an 18½ couple mixed pack with Modern English, Old English and even some Welsh blood on view which, in a very short time, he has fashioned into a hard driving and workman like pack. Assisted here by Alan Watson he moved off and immediately drew the nearby Smith's Bog.

Hounds put one fox afoot to presage a short but fast hunt before this customer went to ground. Jack drew steadily around Tullyrior and hounds put a second fox afoot in increasingly windy conditions. They pushed their fox hard and he gave them and the mounted field, under Alexander Mills MFH, much to do to keep up. This hunt finished with our pilot being marked to ground near one of the areas featured in the TV series "Game of Thrones" at the former Ballievy Factory Mill.

At McGrath's hounds were shown to their absolute best. Having put another fox afoot they pushed him very hard

with all 18½ couple doing so and all in very good voice. This hunt ended with the fox going to ground in a pipe at Finney's Oil. As it was now late afternoon and so much ground had been covered to leave us quite a distance from the meet Jack Harris blew for home.

In talking to the huntsman back at the meet he said to me "I'm not just saying this because you're here but that was our least day yet." No wonder his reputation is growing! It was good to see two former Masters Bob Wilson and John Porter, who himself hunted these hounds for several years, nod in approval as they watched the new man at work.

The **West Wicklow Foxhounds'** biennial visit to the East Down Foxhounds' took place at Crossgar and saw visiting huntsman Rupert Macauley MFH, with his joint masters Christy Hart and Judy Moloney produce his steadiest hounds. Rupert was assisted by whippers –in brothers Paul and Christopher Hart and by Ronan Moloney while the East Down joint masters, Pat Turley and Donna Quail had charge of the mounted field.

On a chilly day, where the wind was building strongly throughout, Rupert first drew off Lough Road on the Ervine family land. In the second covert

hounds put a fox afoot and he gave a sharp hunt right through McCleary's before going to ground at Beechview Road.

A second series of draws, across Ervine's, all proved blank as did a number of draws in Ferris's. Hounds fared no better back in Ervine's but when they drew David Stevenson's they put another fox afoot and a fast circular hunt ensued before this fox was lost. Rupert next drew right across Roy Carlisle's, David McClurg's and then Armstrong's without success. By now, thinking of the long drive back to County Wicklow, the huntsman blew for home to allow everyone to enjoy the hospitality of the nearby "Davidson's on the hill" restaurant.

### **Galtee Foxhounds raise E2,600 for the Air Ambulance**

A fundraising effort by the Galtee Foxhounds has resulted in a total of E2,600 being collected for the North Cork based Air Ambulance.

Huntsman Kevin Casey, having heard that the Ambulance had been suspended through lack of funds, decided to see what he could do.

He organised an auction, with himself as auctioneer, and the articles sold included an original Galtee Hunt

coat which his father, Martin, bought for 440 Euro.

This was an excellent effort which does this community based Hunt great credit and it ensures that the Ambulance remains available to the community.

### **Hunt Changes**

Former North Down Foxhounds' huntsman Lee Peters will hunt The County Down Hounds this season.

Mark Ollard has moved from the Westmeath Foxhounds to the South Wold, in Lincolnshire, where he joins the mastership and will hunt hounds.

He has been succeeded by Niall Dunne, a former Westmeath whipper-in, who moves from the Waterford where he, in turn, has been succeeded by whipper-in Jim Kenny.

### **Quorn Hunt Grand National**

One of the most innovative fund raising ideas to have been organised during the Coronavirus pandemic was the Quorn Hunt's Grand National. A number of Hunts entered what soon became an international competition to find the fastest hound.

The East Antrim joint masters Bob McKnight and John Minford together with huntsman Robbie Hodge and his whipper-in/fiancée, Emma Newham, organised a team to compete, selecting a ten couple mixed pack to meet the competition's requirements.

Video recordings, viewed on social media by independent judges, declared the East Antrim's Poldark 18 to be the winner. Second place went to the VWH and, to underline the international nature of the contest a Dutch pack, the De Veluwe, came third.

Robbie Hodge told me that the £500 first prize has been split, half going to the NI Air Ambulance with the other half being reserved to assist in the organisation of a similar event to be staged by the East Antrim Hunt in the near future

### **Death of Mrs Joan Close MH**

The sole Master of the Newry Hunt, Mrs Joan Close, died 13th June 2020

causing widespread sorrow throughout the Newry area and beyond. Mrs Close succeeded her late husband, Maxwell, in the Mastership on his death in 1995 and was a very keen hunting lady, despite not riding to hounds herself.

A quiet, unassuming lady Mrs Close maintained the family's interest in and support for the Hunt which goes back to 1905 when Major Maxwell Close joined the Mastership. A member of the family has been in the Mastership, apart from the period 1924-1929 when Captain Roger Hall served alone, ever since.

Every sympathy is extended to Mrs Close's son Maxwell, her daughters Elizabeth and Gillian and the entire family circle in their very sad loss.

### **Death of Dr JF (Fitz) Gillespie**

The death of Dr Fitz Gillespie caused very wide spread shock and sadness across Co Armagh and well beyond.

Fitz, as he was widely and very popularly known, was joint master of the Tynan and Armagh Hunt from 1964 until 2008 and had been hunt chairman from 1965 until his death. Well known for his dapper appearance, including a trade mark bow tie, he succeeded his late father, Dr GF Gillespie, both in the Tynan medical practice and in the mastership of the Hunt when he died in 1964. A long serving member of the Turf Club and the IHRB Fitz's service to racing was recognised by HM the Queen when he was appointed an MBE in 2008. The Doctor was married twice, initially to Dr Barbara Ann Gillespie, whom he met at university and then, after her death, to Lady Elizabeth Jane Alexander Gillespie who died in 2017.

Fitz was described as "the essence of good humour and politeness" by the racing correspondent Margie McCloone. This writer could think of no better description of Fitz Gillespie whose passing leaves all of us the poorer. I will leave the last word to senior joint master Brian Dougan who

said of Dr Fitz "his advice and wisdom will be sadly missed. I will remember him as a great friend and support in my situation"

Every sympathy is extended to the Doctor's children, daughter Gael, to his sons Patrick and Rollo and to the entire family circle.

### **Death of Johnny Vance MH**

The death of Johnny Vance at 51 years of age, after an illness, was deeply felt across the Irish hunting and point-to-point communities.

For so many years involved with the Fermanagh Harriers Johnny also had a lengthy involvement with point-to-pointing often on home bred horses, of whom he and his late father, Billy, produced so many.

Having hunted with the Fermanagh's all his life and been joint master, since 1994, Johnny left in 2016 to found his own pack, the Scarva House Harriers, named after the family home outside Clones. Johnny's total commitment to and focus on his sport and an infectious enthusiasm, which rubbed off on everyone, will be sadly missed.

His funeral, at Golanduff, was very well attended with his interment following in Clones Presbyterian Graveyard.

Johnny is survived by his wife, Sylvija, his children from his first marriage Daniel, Arabella and Chloe, his mother Maeve and siblings Andrew, Susan and Clare, to whom every sympathy is extended.



*The late Johnny Vance with his two sisters.*

# Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Roundup

## **The North West Terrier, Lurcher and Whippet Club, Sunday 15th March 2020**

Just prior to lockdown I was able to attend this event at Barrentop Fun Farm, Donemana, Co Tyrone. Although it was icy cold, it kept mostly dry with the exception of a few light showers.

## **Showing Results**

Children's Handling - Cayce O Hagan with Tyson, Brooke Rafferty with Red, Sophie Brooks with Milo

Overall Champion Lurcher - Jed Donagh with Jake Reserve Champion Danny Maxwell with Blue

Overall Champion Terrier - Martin Breen with Junior Reserve Peter Morgan with Bingo

Overall Champion Whippet - Colin and Megan Tucker with Cooper, Reserve Susanne Addis with Poppy

Overall Champion Strong Dog - Frankie Walls with Mylo, Reserve David Hannah with Thunder

Overall Champion Bull Cross - Neil Pinkerton with Ben, Reserve Charlene Rafferty with Jester

Overall Champion Pup - Lexie Hughes with Finn, Reserve Zoe Brooks with Milo

Overall Champion and Best in Show - Jed Donagh with Jake, Reserve Colin and Megan Tucker with Cooper

## **Championship Qualifiers**

Qualifiers: Lurchers Jed Donagh with Jake; Terriers Martin Breen with Junior; Whippets Colin and Megan Tucker; Under 23 rough Danny Maxwell with Blue; Bull Cross Bitch Charlene Rafferty with Red; Bull Cross Dog Charlene Rafferty with Jester; Racing Whippet - Brooke Rafferty with Milly

## **Some Racing Results**

Whippets - Alex and Gladys Savage

with Murphy, Reserve Susanne Addis with Poppy

Bull Cross - Charlene Rafferty with Red Reserve, Charlene Rafferty with Shifter

Over 23 Michael Parry with George 2nd under 23 Rough Danny Maxwell with blue

Many thanks to the Judges on the day: Lurchers Ian Greer, Terriers Jackie Norman, Whippets Seamus Kearney, Strong Dogs Barry Holland, Bull Cross Chontelle Mc Meekan, Children's Handling: Margaret Mc Stay. Thanks is also due to Barry Holland, John Shaw and Colin Maguire and the organising team.

## **Obituary - Valerie Best**

It is with deep regret and shock we learned of the sudden passing of Mrs



Valerie Best a much loved and admired lady in the canine world. Valerie was secretary of the Northern Ireland Whippet Club, and along with her husband David, showed their Whippets at many dog show venues over the years.

Valerie was laid to rest in her native Ahorey, with many of her doggie friends in attendance. Valerie will be sadly missed. She will be remembered with happy memories, which will cling around her name at every show ring in the Canine world. Condolences to husband David and Family.

## **Lock down and dog shows**

Lockdown due to covid 19 has created havoc with our dog shows and race days up and down the country with just one pre Covid show this year. Hopefully as restrictions begin to ease the outlook should become a little brighter. Equally I know there has to be concern for our wellbeing and health in these very challenging times. It will be wonderful to be able to race and walk around the show ring once again again. The following events are still planned to take place, further details to follow:

### **Saturday 25th July 2020**

Man o' War dog show and race day Clay Lake, Keady Road, Co Armagh.

### **Sunday 2nd August 2020**

NW Lurcher, Terrier and Whippet Club dog show and race day

### **Sunday 16th August 2020**

NILRC Championship dog show and race day, Ballymena, Co Antrim.

### **Saturday 22nd August 2020**

Kells Dog show

### **Sunday 23rd August 2020**

DWTC dog show

# PICTURED AT THE NW SHOW



1. Colin Tucker with Cooper Reserve  
Susanne Addis with Poppy.

2. Ken Wilson with Eddie & Jazz.

3. Neil Pinkerton with Ben.

4. rankie Walls with Mylo.

5. Winner of the Lurcher Pairs Class.

6. Jed Donagh with Jake Reserve Danny Maxwell with Blue.

7. Cayce O Hagan age 10 with her dog Neo.



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# The Colourful and Unusual Characters of the Foxhunting Field

I have a number of volumes about eccentrics in my book collection and many of them were, and are, members of the foxhunting world. It's always good fun reading about some of the antics and behaviour of these colourful and out-there members of the hunting field. Most of them lived in the 19th and 20th Centuries, in Ireland and Britain.

In Ireland, the horseriding scene has produced quite a few larger than life characters and thankfully a few of them are still with us. Some of them were very eccentric; some were charmingly colourful; and some were simply

inspirational, displaying a grit and determination which was beyond the ordinary.

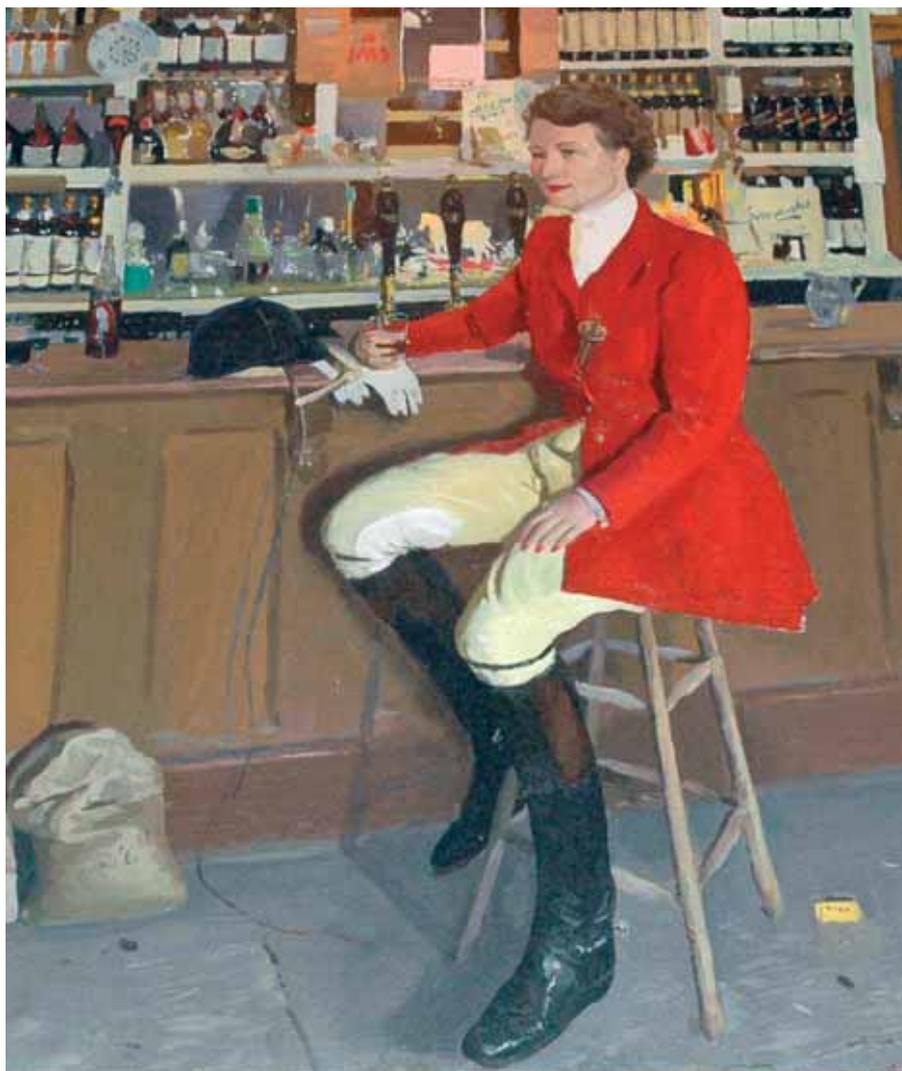
There was, for example, Lady Molly Cusack-Smith who was the first lady master and huntsman of the Galway Blazers when she took up the roles in 1939. Lady Molly had a strong artistic inclination, which she expressed in singing, cooking and designing clothes. She was also known for telling you exactly how she felt (a characteristic which is euphemistically described as being a person who "didn't suffer fools gladly.")

Lady Molly founded the North

Galway Foxhounds in 1943 and the pack developed a reputation for great hunting and fantastic hunt balls. There were many tales told about those balls over the years. There were also many memorable hunts. One legendary hunt was when hounds chased the same fox from Castlehacket to Annaghdown, without stopping, over a period of two hours. Eventually, the fox (who sounds as if he was a member of the unusual brigade himself) swam out to an island on Lough Corrib thus evading the pursuing pack. There were only eight followers left at the end of this extraordinary run and they stood on the lakeshore watching Rénard heading for the islet.

Lady Molly suffered a number of bad falls and it was said that she had broken nearly every bone in her body. Despite all these breaks she continued to hunt fearlessly and enjoyed a long career as master of the North Galways, from 1943 to 1984. For many of those years she was also the huntsman. Molly made all her clothes, as well as the curtains and furnishings in her house. She had been trained in opera and liked singing Irish ballads, including *The Queen of Connemara* and *The West's Awake*. She ran her house as a guest house and most people staying loved the experience. However, one evening an irascible guest had too much to drink and accused Molly of being a West Brit. Legend has it that Molly picked up a plate and smashed it over the offender's head! Molly lived to the grand old age of 92, passing away in 1997. She had proved herself to be remarkably resilient in the world of foxhunting which was often a tough, male-dominated environment.

Maxie Scully wasn't one of the eccentric equestrians, but he was certainly inspirational. His life story was extraordinary. Maxie endured a long list of health setbacks, including seven heart attacks, a triple heart



*The painting of Lady Molly Cusack Smith MFH hanging in my uncle Brendan Higgins' Bar in Athenry painted by Simon Coleman RHA (photo courtesy of Noel Mullins, [www.noelmullins.com](http://www.noelmullins.com) and Oonagh Mary Hyland).*



*Galwayman Maxie Scully creating a new world record of six feet seven and a half inches in the Bareback High Jump at the RDS Indoor Show.*

*(photo courtesy of Noel Mullins [www.noelmullins.com](http://www.noelmullins.com) and Gerry McGarry)*

bypass, the insertion of a defibrillator, a kidney transplant, skin cancer growths which had to be removed every three months, a brain tumour and the removal of a gall bladder. He suffered a number of family tragedies including losing his brother and sister at an early age, and losing his 17 year old son Marcus in a car accident. Maxie's health problems began when he was 18 and he was one of the longest recipients of a donor kidney in Ireland.

In spite of all of that, Maxie showed himself to be possessed of a grit and determination which was incredible and inspirational. He continued horseriding and time and time again proved himself to be a fine equestrian. He loved foxhunting and was excellent at showjumping. His greatest moment in the showjumping arena was when he created a new world record by jumping six feet seven and a half inches riding a horse bareback over poles at the Royal Dublin Society Indoor Show.

Maxie grew up in Gort, Galway and at an early age showed how good a rider he was, winning many ribbons at pony jumping events. He took part in his first

hunt, with the Galway Blazers, at the age of four. Maxie had hoped to showjump for Ireland and would have probably made the team but his hopes were dashed because of his ill health. After his kidney transplant in 1975 he was told by his doctors that it was

unlikely he would ever be able to ride again. Maxie wanted to prove them wrong. He undertook a programme of rebuilding his fitness with the ultimate aim of being able to hunt and showjump on a regular basis. At the same time he set about completing his Hotel Management studies. His focus, his never-say-die attitude, were exemplary. He had a good philosophy about life as well, believing that one had to "live for today". His motto during times of despair and adversity was to think of a special occasion and say to oneself, "I would like some more of that."

After sticking for some time to his fitness regimen he proved the doctors wrong and was back in the saddle again, joining many hunts and participating in many showjumping events, which he continued doing over three decades. One of the events he attended was the World Transplant Games, at which he displayed yet again, to the crowd watching, what a fine rider he was.

Maxie was always planning ahead, wanted to do things that most horseriders, unbothered by his health problems, wouldn't have wanted to imitate, because they considered them to be too difficult. His health problems meant he had to regularly attend



*Aidan O'Connell hunting with the Genesee Valley Hunt in America.*

*(photo courtesy of Noel Mullins, [www.noelmullins.com](http://www.noelmullins.com))*

treatments in hospitals. He played an increasingly important role that would benefit other patients who required organ donations. He acted as an ambassador for organ donation and transplantation and did lecture tours of various countries, including the Ukraine, Japan and South Africa, speaking at length at Medical Conferences. His aim in these lectures was to show people how they could get on with life in the most positive way they could, despite having had organ donations.

His sister Lorraine said about him, "If he could bottle his bravery and will to live, he would be a millionaire." Sadly Maxie lost his brave fight against his poor health at the young age of 52 in August 2006.

Aidan O'Connell is another Irish horserider who fits into the eccentric bracket. While eccentrics are something of a motley crew, ranging from the good to the bad to the ugly, Aidan fits firmly into the good category. His dress sense is unusual and he was always impeccably turned out for hunts in top hat and tails (tailored by William Frazer in Hospital, Limerick). Like many eccentric foxhunters before him he enjoyed taking on feats of endurance.

For example, in one relatively short period of time during a season he hunted for forty days and attended forty black tie dinners afterwards.

After many years in the saddle, Aidan retired from riding two years ago, participating in his final hunt on his favourite hunter Oliver. He continues to teach cross country riding and pre hunting courses in the UK, Germany, Holland and the US. He regularly extols the virtues of the Irish Hunter and people seeking new horses often seek out his advice; he has been sourcing horses for local and international clients for many years.

Aidan hunted with over a hundred packs of hounds in several different countries, including South Africa and America. He also rode at Grand Prix level in showjumping. He believes that the trials and tribulations to be experienced during a typical day's hunting in Ireland are the very best training for a competitive rider in the making.

Hunting was his favourite sport, but race riding came a close second because it combined the thrill of galloping and jumping at speed. He took part in the Aintree Grand National in 1979. He

backed himself £500 at 6/1 but his race came quickly to an end when his horse fell at the first fence. In the press he was referred to as the fellow with a bow tie and carnation riding in the National. Unfortunately Aidan had injured his shoulder during the fall and was taken away in an ambulance.

His pre-season hunting lessons are acclaimed for being full of good advice and sound sense. His lessons are focussed on safety first. He tells the clients that you can't eliminate the risk in foxhunting but you can do a number of things to significantly reduce that risk. He's an advocate of not interfering with a horse too much and teaches people to have the good sense to know when to let the horse go through its natural motions. Buzzing with energy and a can-do attitude, Aidan's enthusiasm for horseriding and for life is infectious.

Contemporary life can seem a bit colourless, homogenous, and you would be forgiven for thinking that the days of unique people on the hunting field are gone.

They had their heyday in the 19th Century, you might think, but now they have pretty much vanished. When you



Jack Mytton riding his pet bear into the dining room at Halston.

investigate a little, however, you find that this in fact isn't true. There are still plenty of different, atypical people out there, who want to lead a different life to the prescribed one. Examples like Lady Molly Cusack-Smith and Aidan O'Connell prove the truth of this. Lady Molly and Aidan are what one might call nice eccentrics. True, Molly might have been a strong-minded person but, to some extent, she had to be in what was an often tough world, but her characteristics never matched the wildness and dangerous attitude of some of the 19th Century foxhunting fraternity.

Take for example Jack Mytton, Squire of Halston in Shropshire, who was an eccentric in the spectacular and dangerous mould. Mytton's hunting horse was called Baronet. It had only one eye, having lost the other eye when being employed as Mytton's charger on the battlefield. Baronet was well known for having an excellent jump. Sometimes, during bad weather Mytton would knock on a cottage door and ask if Baronet could dry off by the fire. He was rarely refused because the cottage probably belonged to him anyway. Unfortunately, he didn't prescribe such good treatment for another of his horses on another cold, inclement day. He gave this horse, called Sportsman, a bottle of port to warm it up. Sportsman drank the full contents of the bottle and soon after, sadly, died.

Mytton came from a good county family in Shropshire and he inherited a big fortune. He proved troublesome from an early age and was expelled from every school he went to. When he became an adult he steadily frittered away his vast sums of money until it was all gone, most of it on drink. His poison of choice was port, with some estimating that he got through five to eight bottles a day. Mytton was the Master of his local hunt but he cared little for his pack, not being disciplined enough with them, and selling them for much less than they were worth when times grew hard. His hounds were so ill-disciplined that even his huntsman

remarked that they would chase anything "from an elephant down."

Once when a solidly-built Welsh miner tried to turn back the pack from its line of hunt, Mytton challenged him to a boxing match. They fought twenty rounds until the miner gave in. Mytton congratulated the miner on his performance and gave him half a sovereign. "In the saddle," wrote his biographer, Charles Apperley, in 1835, "he ran prodigious risks for his life, not only by riding at apparently impracticable fences, with hounds, but in falling from his horses when intoxicated.... That he saw his 38th year must be attributed to the signal interposition of Providence, for scarcely a day passed over his head in which he did not put his life to the hazard. Some of his escapes, indeed, border closely on the miraculous."

Like many eccentrics, Mytton loved clothing. At one stage he was the owner of 150 pairs of riding breeches, 700 pairs of boots, over 1,000 hats and nearly 3,000 shirts. However when he went shooting he was often underdressed for the cold, winter days. He would head out with his gun, even when it was below freezing, wearing only the lightest of jackets, trousers and stockings; and footwear which was nowhere near robust enough for the job in hand. Sometimes the excitement of the chase would overpower him and he would throw off all his clothes and chase the ducks naked through the marshes.

He rode his gig and horse in a dangerous manner, sometimes driving into rabbit holes as fast as he could manage to see if the gig would turn over. It often did. One unfortunate passenger asked him to slow down. Mytton asked the passenger if he had ever experienced being overturned in a gig. The passenger said he had not. "Then what a damned slow fellow you must have been all your life," exclaimed Mytton, and turned the vehicle over. Thankfully, they both escaped unhurt.

On another occasion he decided to ride a pet bear into the midst of a dinner

party, causing terror and consternation in the dining room. Unluckily for Mytton the bear got out of control and bit the rider's calf. A doctor had to be called. His biographer recalled the incident, saying Mytton was in full hunting costume: "The animal carried him very quietly for a certain time; but on being pricked by the spur he bit his rider through the calf of his leg, inflicting a severe wound."

It took him only 15 years to gamble away the family estate in Shropshire, lose the Parliamentary seat which the Myttons had held for generations, and dispose of his inheritance. He died in a debtor's prison.

There were aspects of his character which were likeable. His bravery could be impressive and his eccentricity could be good-natured and charming. It's probably on account of these likeable aspects of his personality that more than 3,000 of his hunting companions and other acquaintances attended his funeral.

In Ireland, contemporaneous with Mytton, was the colourful Lord Waterford, the 3rd Marquess. Like Mytton, the Third Marquess (whose name was Henry Beresford) was fond of partying hard and he originated the phrase "painting the town red" when on a serious drinking spree with foxhunting friends in Melton Mowbray in 1837 (during which he literally painted the town red). Beresford and his friends had been drinking heavily at local races and the tollkeeper said he would only admit them to the town if they paid him. Beresford and the others didn't like the attitude of the tollkeeper and seeing brushes, ladders and pots of red paint nearby decided to use these to paint the tollkeeper and a constable. They then went through the town, painting the doors of houses as they passed, pulling on door knockers and knocking over flower pots. They painted more constables red. The following day, when the Marquess had sobered up, he paid for the damage. In court he was found not guilty of riot but was fined £100 for assault.

Also contemporaneous with Mytton and the Third Marquess was George Osbaldeston, who was so devoted to foxhunting that he was popularly known as "The Squire of All England." He used to hunt six days a week and performed prodigious feats of endurance. Born in 1786, he became a Master of Hounds when an undergraduate in Oxford. He left university early, without taking a degree, in order to devote more time to hunting. He became a Member of Parliament at the age of 25, but was rarely present, preferring instead to be out hunting with the Pytchley, as Master, or shooting in Norfolk, racing at Newmarket, or gambling.

He was reputed to have killed 98 birds with a hundred shots, to have put forty bullets from a pistol through the ace of diamonds at thirty yards, to have played billiards for fifty hours non-stop, and in one all-night card session to have gambled £100 a trick and £1,000 a rubber.

He rode so tirelessly that he exhausted his hounds, so he bought mastiffs instead which he thought had more endurance. In 1831 he lay down a bet that he could ride two hundred miles in ten hours, going repeatedly round the Newmarket racecourse. He turned up at the racecourse wearing a purple silk shirt, white riding breeches and black velvet cap. He was standing at just over five feet tall. He won the bet, completing the two hundred miles in eight hours and forty-two minutes, using 27 horses. He stopped only once during the ride where his refreshment was partridge and a brandy-and-water.

One evening at a ball in Lincoln, Osbaldeston saw that a very attractive lady was in need of a particularly pretty orchid. He therefore rode 25 miles to a conservatory, procured an especially fine orchid, rode back and presented it to the lady who was still at the ball. He danced with her until dawn.

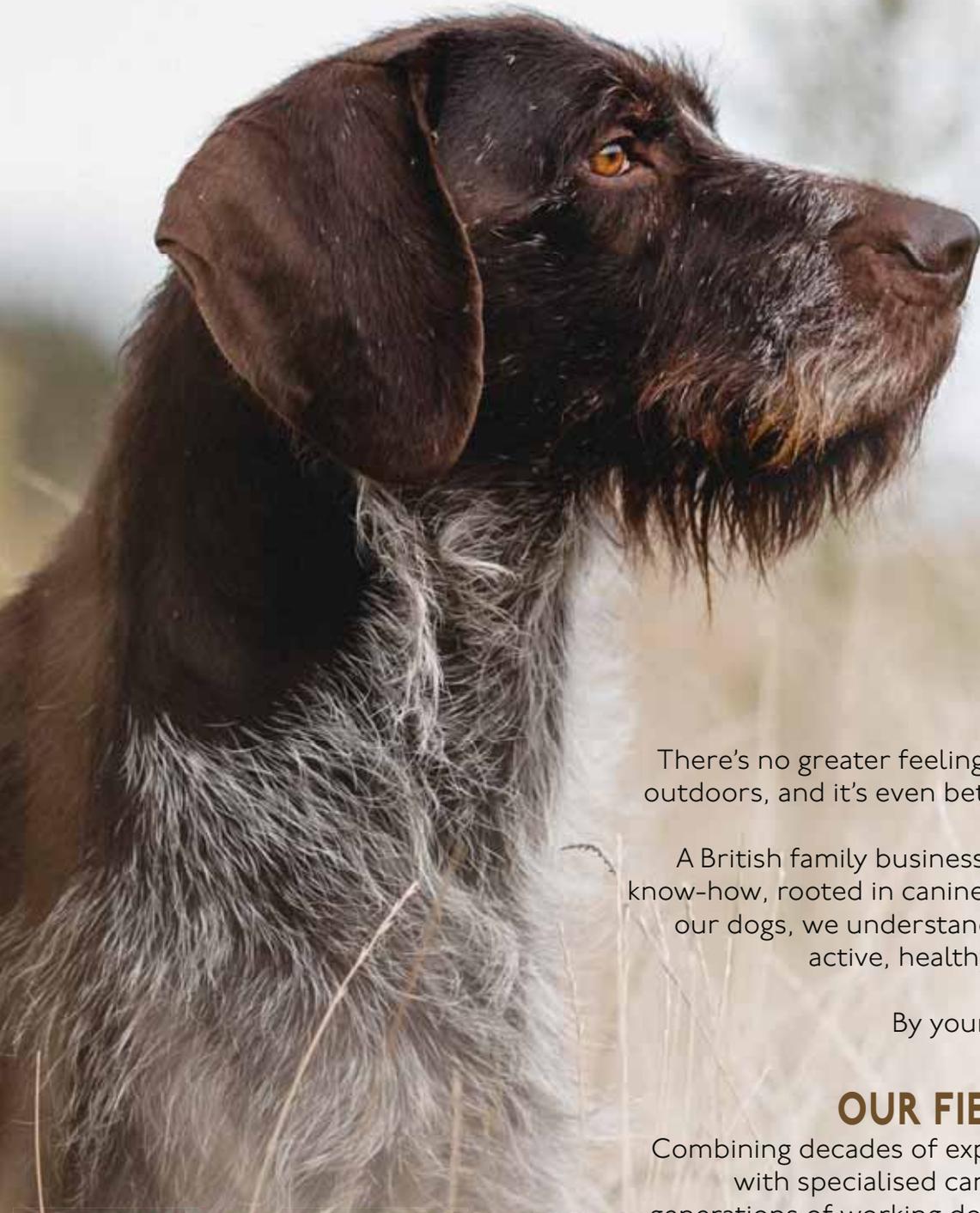
Over the years he accrued gambling debts of around £200,000, which eventually forced him to sell his lands in 1848 and led to his dying almost



*George Osbaldeston*

penniless. A friend commented, "He was open-hearted and trusted others; he was constantly deceived and robbed, and when his affairs were getting into confusion, he had not the moral nerve to pull up in time; nor had he a sufficiently business-head on his shoulders to guide him safely out of his troubles."

Finally, I would like to thank Noel Mullins for providing some of the information for this article. Noel has written several excellent books about Irish equestrian subjects. More information about these books can be found on his website [www.noelmullins.com](http://www.noelmullins.com)



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# Moose hunt in the Yukon



*Setting off across the Fannin Valley.*

The scale of Yukon always knocks me flat on my back. When you look across a valley and try to estimate the distance to the far side, you invariably get it all wrong – so very wrong. What you might have thought would be a two or three-hour horseback ride will end up taking a full day, if not longer. At night, it's even more awe-inspiring as the northern lights (Aurora borealis) fire up the sky and put on the most amazing show of every colour you could possibly imagine.

Hunting in Yukon is special. I'd been here – in the Fannin Valley, north of Drury Lake – two years prior, with Bill Sandulak of Trophy Stone Outfitting from Whitehorse. That time I hadn't seen a bull I wanted to take. I had, however, been taken aback by the grandeur of the landscape and the remoteness of the wilderness, so at the end of that first hunt I made myself a pledge to return and see if I could find the elusive bull moose another time. So, in October 2019, I was back for another ten days with Bill. When choosing any outfitter or guide, as well as going by their hunting prowess, you'll want to get on with them personally. That's why I chose Bill again: he is a mighty fine

hunter and a super fine human being.

From my hometown Levin, on New Zealand's North Island, it's quite a journey. First, you have to take four flights in relatively large aeroplanes. This takes you to Yukon and the last major airport, Whitehorse. From there, you take a smaller plane to fly into camp – for me this time it was a romantic looking, amphibious De Havilland DHC-6-300 Twin Otter. From there on, all travel was on horseback or foot – to the discomfort of my posterior, mostly on horseback.

We arrived at the main camp, which was quite a large affair with horse corrals and individual cabins, along with a kitchen cabin for meals. Lower down the hillside, below the camp, there was even a shower. The water was heated in a 44-gallon drum then gravity-fed down to the shower room. In the bathroom, written on the wall, was a note dating from 1981 from the builder of the shower stating how to use the somewhat basic system.

A quick glance at the instructions was soon followed by the unexpected realisation that this shower builder just happened to be a friend of mine back in New Zealand. It was one of those moments when you realise what a small

world we live in. Imagine his surprise when I grabbed my sat phone and promptly rang him to say: "Mate, I'm standing naked in your shower..." especially since it was 3.30 am in his morning!

## ***Winter arrives and travelling is slower***

Winter arrived the day after we did. Heavy snow storms made travel interesting to say the least. The main storm lasted three days, then the skies cleared. As a result, travelling became slower, but the physical tracking of the moose was easier due to the fact you could spot their tracks and determine fairly accurately when they had passed by a particular spot.

From base camp, we rode to the outer camps. Some days, this could require a journey of up to eight hours. I generally feel that nothing about hunting is really 'difficult': some things will be harder than others, but every single experience and occurrence is enjoyable. Ironically, however, riding in Yukon is one of the things I do find challenging. For some reason my behind doesn't like western saddles. I can ride all day on a Kiwi stock saddle, or an English saddle, but me and the western version simply



*Our pilot's view from the De Havilland Twin Otter seaplane.*

don't get along, I believe they stretch me in places I am definitely not meant to be stretched!

Having reached the outer camp, we'd get back in the saddle or walk to the prime hunting spots, where we'd call and do a lot of glassing. My advice to anyone going to hunt moose is to take the best optics you can afford, as you will spend a lot of time looking through them. With these, as with clothing and all other kit, Yukon is a place for the tried and tested: it is no place for the unknown. With most of the country being covered on horseback, it's also vital that your kit could take a bit of a bashing, as it tends to do when stuffed into saddlebags. I've had my Leica 10 x 42 rangefinding Geovids with me on numerous hunts for a decade or more and they're still my preferred binoculars. For getting a closer view of trophy potential I use my Leica APO-Televid 65 spotting scope.

The hunting wasn't always what you might call 'easy', but I never think of the day-to-day challenges of hunting as hurdles. For me, it's about just getting on with it and savouring each moment. If you embrace the entire hunt, you'll find yourself learning with each day. As a hunter, you're not just there to hunt moose, but to hunt your true self. The Indian leg wrestling back at camp once hunt was finished was the hard part, along with persuading my backside back into that Western saddle.

### **Eagles were overhead, hunting prey**

Every day of the hunt was different and brought it's own highlights. You might not make contact with any moose on a particular day, but you'd spot a wolverine stealing meat from a wolf kill, or eagles overhead hunting prey, then swooping down on a fox that's trying to escape. There is so much going on all the time. You need to open your eyes and take in every single experience, use all your senses – including your sixth – and live each day as it comes. I always like the saying that if you ask a bull moose what time it is he will answer: "Now." We should all try to live more in the now; most hunters are pretty good at it.

Something else I believe is that a kill is not what makes a hunt successful - it's the whole experience. Did I get moose? Not on the first trip with Bill;

we saw moose but I decided not to take one that time. On this expedition, two years later, I did take a nice bull, but I count both hunts as successful.

One thing that can make or break both an experience and a shot is good kit. The day I shot my bull I lay in the snow, not moving, for five-and-a-half hours, waiting for the perfect shot. If I didn't have good gear there's no way I could have done that.

You need good boots, good clothing and a rifle fitted with great optics. Everything from base layers to mid layers and outer layers has to perform in an exemplary manner when the mercury drops. You don't want to leave anything to chance. I take two pairs of gloves: one light fleece pair that are reasonably light and can be easily stowed in pockets and dry very quickly, plus a heavier set of over-mitts, which are rain and snow proof, and fit over the top of the lighter fleece pair.

I'm also in debt to my Swazi kit - from thick woollen socks, long johns, long sleeve thermal base layer, heavy fleece mid layers, to my windproof Micro Driback fleece pants and Nahanni or Tahr XP jackets for wearing while riding. These are a godsend when the wind picks up and you are spending hours on the back of a horse. Plus they are tough, so when riding through heavy brush they don't rip.

With all that, those long hours lying in the snow weren't so bad and I was able to make the most of the moment



*Touchdown at camp.*



*Winter comes with a sharp blast.*



*A successful shot doesn't mean the end of the work.*



*Not a pick of the carcase was wasted.*

when it came. A successful shot doesn't mean the end of the work, however, and we set about preparing the carcase. We quartered the moose in the field and brought back every ounce of meat, including the meat between the ribs. We also brought back all the entrails as there was another hunter in camp who wanted them as bait for wolves. We

loaded everything, including the antlers, onto the packhorses and struck out for home.

Back at camp, we weighed all the meat and antlers as we needed to let our pilot know roughly how much gear we would be flying out aboard the pocket-sized De Havilland DHC-3 Turbo Otter that would take us back out of the

wilderness. The total came to 1,452 lb. Fortunately, we were within the weight limit, and I was able to take the antlers and hide to a taxidermist just outside of Whitehorse, who would strip the skull and clean it, plus dry the hide then ship it off to be tanned ready for mounting back in New Zealand. Hunting somewhere as awe inspiring as Yukon deserves a magnificent memento, but deciding to mount a full body moose is a huge undertaking and one which I think I'll only do the once!

For more information on Trophy Stone Outfitting, visit:

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

### **Kit box**

Rifle: Kimber Montana in .300WSM, Leica ER 2.5–10 x 42

Ammo: Hornady 200gr ELD-X

Optics: Leica Geovid 10x42 rangefinding binoculars, Leica APO Televid 65 spotting scope

Boots: Gronell of Italy

Clothing: Swazi long sleeve micro top base layer, Swazi micro shirt, Swazi Micro Driback pants, Swazi Tahr XP jacket, Swazi Nahanni jacket

Accessories: Swazi Ali-Gaiters, fleece gloves, waterproof overmitt, Swazi microfleece beanie, Swazi Hunter socks, a light foldable foam pad to sit on when glassing in the snow, sports wrap-around sunglasses (for snow)

# Review of Pointer and Setter Trials in Ireland

In summary, 2019 will be remembered as a good year for pointer and setter field trials in Ireland. Chief among the successes is that the Irish red setter and Irish red & white setter received National Heritage status which will protect these breeds as working Gundogs. On the circuit, it was a busy year with approximately thirty field trials under Irish Kennel club rules and a further eleven under GB Kennel Club rules. There were full results in both Irish championship stakes and the Irish Derby. In addition, a number of new faces made their mark and there was a good spread of different winners. The Gordon setter club of Ireland was formed and completed a novice stake on 14th December. The game situation was generally good with just two of the stakes encountering no game and therefore having no results.

## Championship Stakes

The Irish Championships and Derby stakes are generally the highlights of the calendar year for pointer and setter competitors.



Alan Bartley's FTCh Lisduvoige Tyson Irish Championship Winner on Grouse in 2019. (photo Heike Sporleder)

The Irish Championship on grouse took place on 24th and 25th August and was a stake of quality where dogs particularly in the second round

excelled. There was ultimate success for the popular Alan Bartley who was a first-time winner of this most prestigious stake. His dog Lisduvoige Tyson also achieved his FTCh title with this win. Second place was Paraig Kiely with Ballinahemmy Rose and this result also made Rose a FTCh. These are the first FTChs for both Alan and Paraig. Third and fourth places were also to Irish red setters namely Bill Connolly's Sheantullagh Jessie and Ken Watterson's Erinvale Nippy Glow. There were COMs for Mandy Brennan's English setter Chieftain, Jim Crotty's English pointer Brackbawn Thunder, Ray Monroe's Irish red & white setter FTCh Rosie Jim and Bill Connolly's Irish setter Sheantullagh Cormac.

The Irish championship on snipe on 16th and 17th November in the Midlands was a hugely supported event run in challenging conditions on day one. Again there was success for the Irish red setters being placed first, second and third. Hugh Brady's FTCh Malstabodarna Embla of Ballydavid was the winner with Aidan Dunne's Maodhog Feochadan in second and Pat Reape's FTCh Ballinahemmy Mike in third. There were COMs for Irish red & white setters namely Larry Quinn's Lisduvoige Patch and Vincent Flannelly's Benwhisken Stinger.

The Irish Derby stake was an event of very high quality. It was run in the

Connemara which is one of the most beautiful locations with moorland and tarns touching the wild Atlantic sea with the Aran islands covered in mist. This historical stake was memorable for Ken Watterson from the Isle of Man winning with Cronk Mooar Ola while also being placed third with Cronk Mooar Ness. Hugh Brady's Irish setter Ballydavid The Morrigan completed the all Irish red setters line up in second place.

The European Red Setter club held its Red Setter Championship on snipe in Galway on 16th and 17th October and the winner was French entrant J.F. Meret's Jessie de l'Anse De Ty Roux with Reserve Champion to Pat Reape's FTCh Ballinahemmy Mike.

## New Field Trial Champions

There were a number of new field trial champions in 2019. Billy Grace piloted Capparoe Aife to her FTCh status in the English setter trials on 10th August. The aforementioned Alan Bartley with Lisduvoige Tyson, Paraig Kiely with Ballinahemmy Rose and Hugh Brady with Malstabodarna Embla of Ballydavid also achieved their titles. Pat Dooley with his English pointer Wildfield Fire Dancer achieved his title at the Irish pointer club trials of the 8th September.

## Trial of the Year

The championship and derby stakes



FTCh Malstabodarna Embla of Ballydavid winner of Irish Snipe Championship in 2019. (photo Heike Sporleder)

carry a tension that is hard to replicate but in terms of quality the Irish pointer club stake on the 8th September would be my choice for the trial of the year. There was a plentiful supply of grouse and some of the dogs in the awards managed their birds' multiple times. The winner was Gerald Devine's FTCh Ballyellen Tango with Pat Dooley's newly crowned FTCh Wildfield Fire Dancer in second with Hugh Brady's FTCh Malstabodarna Idun of Ballydavid in third and Donal O'Leary's English setter Kerry's Pick up in reserve. There were COMs for Carol Calvert's English setter Ballyellen Blue Grass, Davy O'Neill's Shanrycon Casey. Other notable mentions include the Irish Red & white setter trial of 7th September also won by Gerald Devine this time with Gortinreagh Faith while Connaught field trials on 28th September had six placings with Hugh Brady's FTCh Malstabodarna Idun emerging on top. In Ulster, the location of Slieveanorra continues to deliver tremendous stakes despite the treacherously difficult terrain. While I did not attend as many trials as I would like, my choice would be Strabane & Districts trial on 5th October won by Andy Law's Shanrycon Diamond with second to Joan McGillicuddy's Gaelforce and Ray Monroe's Red & white setter Granaghsburn Nebraska in third and FTCh Ballyellen Tango in reserve. There were COMs for Mark Adams' FTCh Hunshigo Donard and Des Linton's brace of Craigrua Flute and Craigrua Nevin. Notable mention to the Ulster red setter club in Legfordrum of 9th November where the second round in particular was of the highest quality. Any of the six dogs in the awards could have been the winner.

### **Triple Crown**

It is very rare to see a triple crown but this was achieved by Ken Watterson in the Gaelic Gundog Leagues stake on snipe on 14th November in the Midlands. He was first with Cronk Mooar Ness, second with Cronk Mooar Ola and third with Erinvale Nippy



*Des Linton and Jim Sheridan with their red and white setters which as a breed had a good year. (photo Ray Monroe)*

Glow. What a special achievement and what an incredible year for Ken with his red setters with a placing in the Irish Championship on grouse, a win and a placing in the Irish Derby, and a win in the Native breeds confined stake with Cronk Mooar Ola.

A triple crown of the game variety was completed by Michael Houston's English pointer Int FTCh Ardclins Francie Frank who at the Ulster Red Setter club trial of 9th November had points on snipe, pheasant and partridge over his two rounds.

### **Breed and Dogs of the Year**

The breed of the year was the Irish red setter which won 50% of the 30 open stakes. This excludes the European Red Setter championship as that event was confined to red setters. They were

placed 40 times in 30 stakes. In Ulster, red setters won 64% of the eleven stakes. The Irish red setters received all of the placings in both Irish Championships and also the Irish Derby stake.

The English pointer with the most championship points under IKC rules was Pat Dooley's FTCh Wildfield Dancer. The English setter was Billy Grace's FTCh Capparoe Jata and Irish Red Setter was FTCh Malstabodarna Embla of Ballydavid. The red & white setter was Ray Monroe's FTCh Rosie Jim.

The IKC Dog of the Year for 2019 is Malstabodarna Embla of Ballydavid. She follows in the footsteps of her litter sister FTCh Malstabodarna Idun of Ballydavid who was IKC Dog Of The Year 2017 and 2018.



*Ray Monroe's Granaghsburn Nebraska.*

*(photo Ray Monroe)*



Billy Grace and his team of English setters training. His team in 2019 were the Capparoo's Jata, Aife, Evita and Upperwood Resolution. (photo Billy Grace)

**Special moments**

Billy Grace piloting Capparoo Aife to his FTCh title for his late friend and fanatical field trial competitor, Tommy Dunne (Borrsoleigh) was an especially poignant moment. James Coyle, octogenarian winning the confined

pointer stake in Athy with Brackbawn Wanda. The extension to the second round of the Irish championship on grouse had a fairy tale ending for Alan Bartley and Paraig Kiely with a joint find earning them first and second place consecutively and in the process



Mark Adams' with FTCh Ballydavid Spitfire on his way to winning in Slieveanorra had an amazing year with his team of setters. (photo Ray Monroe)

achieving their first field trial champions. Eugene Moriarty with his English setter Moonhall Ahiga winning his first field trial and Ray Monroes's Irish red & white setter Granaghburn Nebraska the first of its breed to win 'most stylish dog of day one' of the Irish grouse championship.



FTCh Capparoo Jata had an exceptional year. (photo Billy Grace)

Overall many handlers achieved success in 2019. Some dogs and trainers had exceptional years. Pat Reape's FTCh Ballinahemmy Mike continued his success at championships with a Reserve European Snipe Champion and a third place in the Irish snipe championship. Paraig Kiely had a great year with Ballinahemmy Rose and also a win with his Gordon setter Birchvalley Rusty Tipped.

Mark Adams' team of FTCh Ballydavid Spitfire and FTCh Hunshigo Donard had an incredible year with five wins and six seconds while Billy



Ken Watterson and Cronk Moor Ola

Grace's Capparoe team also produced five wins, three seconds and a third. Hugh Brady's Ballydavid team produced seven wins, six seconds and eight thirds.

Billy Grace's FTCh Capparoe Jata had three wins and a number of other placings while Joan McGillycuddy's Int. FTCh Ballydavid Starjet of the Kingdom added another three wins and other placings to her record. Gerald Devine's FTCh Ballyellen Tango also had three wins to his list of achievements while Mark Adams' Irish setter FTCh Hunshigo Donard had four wins and other placings.

### **New Talents of the Year**

Ken Watterson's Irish red setter pup Cronk Mooar Ola with two wins and a second had an astonishing year while litter sister Ness also had a win and a third place.

Other pups in the awards were Billy Grace's Upperwood Resolution of

Capparoe who had a second place on her only start and Hugh Brady's Ballydavid The Morrigan who had two seconds on that number of starts. The derby showed a lot of talented pups and Paraig Kiely's Cronk Mooar Finn, Michael Houston's Sheantullagh Noble and Sean Hogan's Ballydavid Nuada caught the eye as prodigious talents of the future.

Sean Hogans' Sugarloaf Grian impressed on her outing at Connaught field trials and consequently won a solo trial at the European Red Setter club.

### **Blooper of the Year**

The Irish championships bring about a unique tension that causes the most idiosyncratic behaviours. Ballydavid Gaelforce had a strong day one in the Irish snipe championship with a nice find and was seen to be in a good position going into day two. A straightforward run was the order of the day. A wound up handler does nothing

to necessitate that simple plan. When the dog cast in the wrong direction to lay down a marker with her brace mate, maniacal whistling ensued and in the confusion an errant snipe rose behind the dogs. This unfortunate synchrony resulted in a frustrated bark from said dog and instant elimination. Thankfully for the sanity of handler, the dog got another run albeit just to make up a brace where Gaelforce ran well and ended with another find. That piece of insanity still haunts me today but such is the magic of Irish championships!

Field trials are a unique sport, excellent for fitness and have the opportunity to work with dogs on a competitive basis in scenic locations with good camaraderie. If you are interested in getting involved, contact details are with the editor.

At the time of writing it seems positive that pointer and setter trials will recommence in August. The spring report is printed below.

## Spring 2020 Position

2020 will be remembered for an era and beyond. First Storm Ciara, followed on by Storm Dennis and the generation defining Corona 19 virus cancelled the majority of pointer and setter field trials.

The Connaught Novice and Open stakes scheduled for the 8th and 9th February were both shelved due to Storm Ciara. The open stake was re-run but more of that anon. The red & white setter club ran its open stake on the 16th February on a hardy day with several hailstorms. As I sat in the comfort of a restaurant, I wondered did the trial take place. It did, and produced full awards testament to the dogs in what must have been challenging conditions. Judged by the experienced Kieran Walsh (Blackmoor) and Larry Quinn (Tipperary) the winner was the Club President Jim Sheridan with Craigrua Loki. He was awarded an excellent qualification. Second and third, classified as Very Good were Michael



*Jim Sheridan's Craigrua Loki winner of Irish Red & White Setter stake in February 2020.*

Houston (Strabane) with his brace of English pointers Koram Kendall and Int. FTCh Ardclinis Francie Frank respectively while Reserve was Mark Adams (Ballymena) with his Irish setter FTCh Ballydavid Spitfire.

The rescheduled Connaught field trial club open stake took place on 22nd February in Athenry. A lot of areas were flooded but thankfully the ground conditions were fine. The judges for the day were Joe O'Sullivan (Gardenfield), Jason Benson (Concomrue) and Paraig Kiely (Turahan) who had sportingly agreed to fulfil their appointments despite the change in original date. This was Paraig Kiely's first judging appointment so the club wished him well in his future appointments.

Little was I to know that this was to be my one and only trial of Spring 2020. The trial got off to a fast start with finds recorded for David Bells' Irish setter Sheenmel Rosie II and her brace mate Hugh Brady's F.T.Ch Malstabodarna Embla. Leslie Maher's Irish setter dog had a pair of finds and a good run while Michael Ryan's Gardenfield Rascal had an excellent find but was slightly unsteady to shot. Ray Monroe's Granaghburn Nebraska had a very long classy workout on a wisp of snipe. Her kennel mate had two excellent productions in the middle of a hail shower that was hugely impressive.



*Joan McGillycuddy's FTCh Ballydavid Gaelforce was the winner of Connaught spring stakes.*

The first round ended with a long production on a running bird for Anthony Mulhall's Brackbawn Fainohe that was excellent all round.

Int FTCh Ballydavid Starjet had a nice find after some good work. Seven brace were recalled for a second viewing indicating the calibre of work from round one. Antony Mulhall's Brackbawn Fainohe added another find and good running along with her brace mate Malstabodarna Embla. Leslie Maher's Fraoigh Rock added to his credentials with another find. Rocks kennel mate Fraoigh Bracken showed enormous potential also in this round.

Jim Crotty's young pointer dog braced with Ballydavid The Morrigan had a terrific find showing huge intensity in his performance. Billy Grace's Capparoo Evita performed well also. FTCh Ballydavid Gaelforce had sharp running and produced a smart find.

The judges called the results as first place to Joan McGillycuddy's FTCh Ballydavid Gaelforce and second to Leslie Maher's Fraoigh Rock and third place to Anthony Mulhall's Brackbawn Fainohe. Reserve was to Hugh Brady's Int. FTCh Ballydavid Starjet. COMs were awarded to Ray Monroe's brace of Red & white setters Granaghburn

Nebraska and Craigrua hardy, Jim Crotty's Wildfield Highlander, Joan McGillycuddy's Int. FTCh Ballydavid Starjet and Leslie Maher's Fraoigh Bracken.

The inaugural Gordon Setter Club of Ireland open stake was cancelled due to flooding due to Storm Ciara. The Munster pointer and setter club stake scheduled for Kilchreest, county Galway was cancelled due to forecasted storm force gales of Storm Dennis.



*Aidan Dunne's Maodhog Feochadan was the winner of the premier county spring stakes.*

As it turned out, the last weekend of trials that did take place was the Premier County open stake with new secretary Alan Bartley in the familiar location of Kinnity, county Offaly. Judged by Anthony Mulhall (Mountbay) and Alan Bartley (Ballinahemmy), there was just one award. The winner being Aidan Dunne's Irish setter Maodhog Feochadan with a snipe classified as excellent. The next day was the Cill Dara stake in the Wicklow mountains hosted by secretary Pat Rohan. Judges for the day were the respected Jim Crotty (Brackbawn) and Kieran Walsh (Blackmoor). The winner was Aidan Dunne with FTCh (Snipe Ch.)

Blackstairs Behenny with second place to the previous days' winner Maodhog Feochadan with third place to Eugene Moriarty's English setter dog Moonhall Ahiga and reserve to Anthony Mulhall's English pointer Gerensary Domino. All dogs had grouse and were graded excellent. It seems to have been a good trial. I was elsewhere in the Coombe hospital welcoming the latest Brady.

Then everything changed. The Irish pointer club responsibly cancelled its open stake scheduled for the 14th March, in advance of any decree and like dominos the remaining clubs followed suit. The Irish kennel club then pronounced on March 13th a cessation of all licenced events until further notice in support of the National effort.

The Ulster trials did also have a weekend of trials. The Ulster Red Setter club on 7th March ran in Slievenaorra, county Antrim and was judged by Andy Law and Dr Stephen Clarke. Slieveanorra, while unforgiving ground seldom has a poor trial. The results were Gerald Devine's Int. FTCh Ballyellen Tango and second place to Brian Morris Irish setter Erinvale Maize and third to Michael Houston's pointer dog Koram Kendall and reserve to Carol Calvert's Irish setter FTCh Gortinreagh Venus.

The next day the Strabane & District field trials took place in Glenwherry, county Antrim. Judged by Michael Houston (Strabane) and Raymond Monroe (Granaghburn) I am told it was



*Mark Adams' FTCh Ballydauid Spitfire was the winner of Strabane & Districts open stake in Glenwherry.*

a very good trial. Glenwherry is a managed grouse moor and has been receiving a lot of public attention for its success in increasing grouse numbers. The results were first place to Mark Adams' Irish setter dog FTCh Ballydauid Spitfire with second and third place to Gerald Devine's English setters Gortinreagh Jack Duggan and Gortinreagh Komiko with reserve to Brian Morris Irish setter Erinvale Mountain.

The rearranged Ulster Gundog League set for 15th March, cancelled from 1st March due to Storm Dennis was again cancelled due to the corona

virus measures. This ended the Spring season of 2020, one that will never be forgotten.

As I write, the UK Kennel Club issued "strong recommendation that clubs and societies cancel forthcoming events until the end of September and that serious consideration should be given to events due to be held after this date". While the Irish Kennel Club "has made the difficult decision to cancel all Dog Show licences for 2020," it continues to explore the possibility of running field trials.

Continue to keep well and safe. Till next time.

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