Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE



FORTY YEARS of PROMOTING IRISH COUNTRY SPORTS - it's a 'ruby anniversary' for the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team in 2018 The very special and largest ever ALL IRELAND IRISH GAME FAIR



Shanes Castle, Antrim 23rd & 24th June

To celebrate the important anniversary of the launch of the Game Fair concept in Ireland at Clandeboye Estate, North Down in June 1979, the Great Game Fairs of Ireland team have decided (for 2018 only) to combine the NI and ROI fairs into one very special ALL IRELAND SHOWCASE for COUNTRY SPORTS at Shanes Castle on the 23rd & 24th June 2018

The ROI Game & Country Fair, previously staged at Birr Castle, Co Offaly will return at a new larger venue in the Irish Midlands on the 24/25 August 2019.

THE SHANES CASTLE event will highlight several other important local anniversaries with special pre fair competitions and publicity; very special competitions at the fair with an exceptional prize fund and special 'RUBY' trophies to be won outright; a number of new trade stands, sensational new attractions and admission concessions.

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Irish COUNTRY SPORTS and COUNTRY LIFE



Front Cover: New Team Member Stevie Munn

Stevie Munn is appointed Irish Country Sports & Country Life's Angling Consultant

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Printed by W&G.Baird Distributed by Easons (Dublin), E M Distribution Also Available by Subscription ISSN No. 1476-8240

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Country Sports and Country Life Rol Comment

ne of the many subjects which greatly intrigue me is the subject of depression and its causes. This of course is a big problem in our society and chances are that many readers of Irish Country Sports and Country Life will know someone who suffers from this condition.

There are many suggestions put forward regarding the tackling of this affliction, and one of them is the ancient cure of hunting. There is little doubt about it, but a day's hunting, in whatever format, is fantastic for mental health.

I read a recent article which talked about "the health impacts of a civilised lifestyle" and argued that because of society's civilised lifestyle depression has become a "global epidemic". Depression is the main driver behind suicide, which now claims more than a million lives per year worldwide. The article stated that one in four Americans will suffer from clinical depression within their lifetimes, and "the rate is increasing with every generation." According to the Samaritans there were 6,639 suicides in the UK and Republic of Ireland in 2015, 451 of those were in the Republic. The highest suicide rate in the UK was for men aged 40 to 44. The highest suicide rate in the Republic was for men aged 25 to 34.

The affliction of depression robs people of sleep, energy, focus, memory, sex drive and their basic ability to experience the pleasures of life. It can destroy people's desire to love, work, play and even their will to live. If left unchecked it can cause permanent brain damage.

One psychiatrist said that depression lights up the pain circuitry of the brain to such an extent that many of his patients call it torment, agony and torture. "Many begin to look to death as a welcome means of escape," the psychiatrist said.

He argued that depression is not a natural disease and is not an inevitable part of being human. He pointed to hunter gatherer societies and their positive mental health, relatively speaking. The process of hunting, he said, does something for our thinking and our feelings which is immensely beneficial. Most hunting people will instinctively know that this is true. I've been saying it for years. It's a fact which the antis obviously fail to mention when criticising the pastimes which we love and which mean so much to us.

Some psychiatrists believe that, like many diseases, depression is a "disease of civilisation". In other words, it's a disease caused by a high-stress, industrialised, modern lifestyle that is incompatible with our genetic evolution. Depression, they point out, is the result of a prolonged stress-response. The brain's "runaway stress response" is similar to the fight or flight response, which evolved to help our ancestors when they faced predators or other physical dangers. The runaway stress response required intense physical activity for a few seconds, a few minutes, or, in extreme cases, a few hours.

The problem is for many people throughout the Western world, the stress response goes on for weeks, months and even years at a time, and when it does that, it can cause us harm. Living under continually stressful conditions (as many modern humans do) is disruptive to neuro-chemicals like dopamine and serotonin, which can lead to sleep disturbance, brain damage, immune dysregulation



and inflammation. Diseases such as diabetes, atherosclerosis, asthma, allergies, obesity and cancer are rampant throughout the developed world, but virtually non-existent among modern-day aboriginal peoples. In a study of 2000 Kaluli aborigines from Papua New Guinea, only one marginal case of clinical depression was found. Why? The experts believe it's because the Kaluli lifestyle is very similar to our hunter-gatherer ancestors' lifestyle that lasted for nearly 2 million years before agriculture.

"99.9 percent of the human experience was

lived in a hunter-gatherer context," one expert points out. "Most of the selection pressures that have sculpted and shaped our genomes are really well adapted for that environment and that lifestyle." In view of nearly 3 million years of hominid existence, since homo habilis first began use of stone tools, our genus has undergone rapid environmental change since the advent of agriculture about 12,000 years ago. And in the last 200 years, since the industrial revolution, our species has had to cope with "radical environmental mutation." While our environment has radically mutated, our human genome is essentially the same as it was 200 years ago. That is only eight generations, which is not enough time for significant genetic adaptations. In other words, we are not designed for the sedentary, indoor, socially isolated, fast-foodladen, sleep-deprived, frenzied pace of modern life.

Anti depressant medication is one possible cure for the problem, but its use is not always necessary. Anti depressant use has gone up enormously in the western world during the last 20 years, but the rate of depression has continued to increase. I agree with many experts who argue that rather than prescribing medication, in many instances people simply need the following: Exercise; Sunlight; Healthy Sleep; Anti-ruminative activity; Social connection. Exercise in a gym or pool is one option but it is not ideal. The ideal is exercise in the natural world.

One psychiatrist I read believes that we are designed to be physically active 'in the service of adapted goals.' Hunting is an 'adapted goal' because it engages in the pursuit of a quarry, whether it be a fox, hare, pheasant, rabbit, deer, etc.

Contemporary hunter gatherers in Africa get four or more hours of vigorous physical activity every day, but if you ask them they will tell you they don't exercise. For them it is not "working out". It is simply living. When I go foot hunting in Kilkenny, Tipperary or Westmeath the days can last from four to eight hours. We have an adapted goal, the pursuit of hare or fox.

We enjoy a lot of exercise, being sometimes very tired by day's end, and we enjoy camaraderie and friendly banter. This combination of exercise, the natural world, social connection and an adapted goal is ticking all the boxes. It is beneficial for our mental health whether we are feeling slightly down due to the January, post Christmas blues or whether we are suffering from the symptoms of chronic melancholia. There is magic and happiness on the hunting field.

Country Sports and Country Life Northern Comment

Big is beautiful. Small is beautiful. Which do you prefer when it comes to shooting or fishing? Perhaps it all depends when that question is asked in a shooter's or angler's life. Ask it of a newcomer and the answer might well be 'big' or maybe even 'anything' if they are entirely new to the game.

Probably, most shooters begin with the vain hope of getting a shot and if we are lucky

something to bring home for the pot. As a young boy, my chosen fishing was for Rudd and I look back on many happy hours on a summer evening waiting for the wind to drop, the Rudd to show up and cast a little float as close as I could to the lily pads. The split shot just below the float would see it cock upright instantly and then came the treasured moment waiting for a first slight knock, then a gentle slide under and the strike.

That water was sheltered and generally surprisingly warm after a summer's day, especially with the wind just gone to leave nary a ripple. Occasionally the float would disappear with a mighty tug as a little jack pike tried its luck, and for all I knew it might well prove to be a monster.

But it was not the pike I was interested in it was the Rudd I was after with its golden scales and reddish pouting lips. Roach and Rudd, the difference being that Roach was not found much in Ireland but Rudd, well that was a different matter. Whereas the top lip of Roach was overhung, on Rudd it was the under lip which protruded.

At first I revelled in the whole thing from casting to waiting with dragon and damsel flies hovering and touching oh so gently on the water and landing sometimes on a piece of vegetation. Which was the dragon and which the damsel? I probably knew then as I read every word on fishing and wildlife that I could get my hands on, but now I can't remember for the life of me. But the yearning for a bite became a hope for many bites and then swiftly a yearning for a 'big' fish.

At the time, my father was racing cars all over Ireland and we would trek to Dublin for racing at Phoenix Park and Mondello, with a week's holiday staying in Wicklow in between. It was then I got to visit a tackle shop somewhere along the Canal. My Dad would drop me off and I would be in paradise looking at and actually handling some of the rods and reels in that Mecca of angling gear.

In reality, I just came out with a catalogue but this catalog was very special to me, it was an Abu catalogue and inside — apart from the excellent range of tackle, were details of an exclusive club where you could get a special pin badge for piscatorial endeavour. And that was something I wanted more than anything. If only I could get a specimen Rudd then that badge would be mine. The amazing tackle, well that was well outside the range of pocket money but the extra special Abu badge was something that might come, if only I could get lucky.

Well, at that lake, one June evening, I caught an 'almost specimen' Rudd, a monster of over 2 pounds; not a record, but a huge fish for the water. Actually that is wrong, it was a big fish but the lake was capable of producing not only numerous smaller fish, but quite a few over the pound mark plus I had seen the dorsal fins and backs of what I took to be 'big' fish as they sipped something from the surface on a summer's day. After getting my local tackle dealer to weigh it with his accurate scales, I sent a scale sample and the appropriate form off to the Swedish tackle firm.

One day there was a small package in the post. I was the proud possessor of an Abu bronze badge! I still have it and taking it from the collar stud box in a drawer in the bedroom still conjures up memories of that magical time so long ago. I swear I can even smell that heavy scented gorse, cocoa nut like and almost overpowering

But I started this editorial by wondering whether it is a case of more, or bigger or smaller or what do you think of when you aim for a day in the field or by the river and I suggested it might be more a case of when the question was asked — starting off or later in a spotting career.

Take my own shooting for example. As a youth, a single box of cartridges would do me a season on Strangford Lough and any shot would be a red letter day. Eventually, pest control saw the numbers increase. Nowadays the hiking over bog and mountain scrub is long gone, and I am very happy with four or five moderate days on a driven shoot, days when I can recall each and every miss as well as the sometimes (for me) good shot and days on which the bag is enjoyed by Guns, beaters and pickers-up as well.

But whether you choose a big day or simply shooting for the pot, I think it all boils down to personal preference or perhaps shooting experience. With more days in pursuit of fish and game than I can remember, I now am more than happy with a day's sport in the company of good friends and a handful of game in the bag. Every so often, maybe a couple of time a year I actually pull off a good shot, enough to make me smile anyway.

As I write, the trout season is almost on us, fly fishing tackle is being sorted, and very soon I'll be casting for a 'wee broon' with a Large Dark Olive, a fly that you can read about elsewhere in the magazine. I can't wait for the warmer weather and hatches of flies bringing trout to the surface on my local river.

But whether you shoot, fish or hunt, or just love the country lifestyle there really is something extra special to look forward to in early summer. It's THE IRISH GAME FAIR & LIVING HISTORY FESTIVAL including a FINE FOOD & DRINKS FESTIVAL at Shanes Castle, Antrim on 23rd & 24th June 2018.

It is our 40th Anniversary Fair and we are pulling out all the stops to make it our 'Fair Of A Lifetime' with thrills, spills, surprises, very special prizes, new acts and surprise guests non stop day long entertainment and much, much more.

Look out for a series of announcements shortly about this really exciting 'Ruby Anniversary' Fair and keep bang up to date on Facebook by following our Great Game Fairs of Ireland page or joining our group. See www.facebook.com/ irishgamefairs/ ?ref=bookmarks and www.facebook.com/groups/ 1720927 26163876/

Come to think of it, with this magazine continuing to expand and considering what will be required to put on the most exciting event in Ireland's Game Fair history at Shanes on 23/24 June, the question is — will I get time to cast a fly? If you see me on the river, it will just mean that I am carrying out some very necessary research. And a fisherman never lies!

Paul Pringle Northern Editor

Stevie Munn joins Irish Countrysports and Country Life magazine as Angling Consultant

We are delighted to announce that Stevie Munn has joined Irish Countrysports and Country life as its angling consultant. Apart from writing his normal articles Stevie, will be happy to carry out tackle and fishery reviews as well as discussing advertising and promotional features. He will also continue to support the Irish Game Fair at Shanes Castle.

Stevie Munn is an Internationally renowned fly fisherman, guide and qualified Instructor who works full time in the angling sector.

Antrim born and having fly fished from childhood, Stevie is now a member of the Marryat World Champion Fly Rod team, Partridge Pro Team, Regal Pro Team and is also a qualified Advanced Professional Game Angling Instructor in Fly Tying and Fly Casting with APGAI-Ireland and an APGAI fly casting instructor.

A World Champion caster, his fly casting competition wins include two Accuracy Casting Championships in England in the 1990s and at the CLA game fair 2011. Stevie helped set a new World Record in fly casting - all done for charity - casting the equivalent of 141 miles and setting the high score of 627 perfect casts in 30 mins.

Stevie has been a Professional Guide and fly fisher for many years for trout, salmon and lough run wild brown trout called Dollaghan, which run his local Six Mile Water River, to spawn. Always willing to try for any fish that will take a fly and, despite winning many fly fishing competitions, nowadays he fishes mostly for pleasure.

Stevie hosts fishing trips worldwide and can help you fish many game angler's paradises including Iceland, Norway and Argentina as well as Ireland.

Stevie Munn's fly patterns have appeared in many angling books, including Malcolm Greenhalgh's 'A Guide to Fishing Flies From Around the World'; 'The North Country Fly' by Robert L Smith; 'Flies That Catch Trout' by Terry Lawton; 'At The End of The Line' by Geoore Barron and the USA book 'Fly Patterns by Fishing Guides' by Tony Lolli.

He is a feature article writer for Irish Country Sports and Country Life.

Stevie also has gained vast experience and has guided, hosted groups and given fly fishing demonstrations and lessons in many parts of the world including Ireland, Norway, Canada, Germany, England, Scotland, Iceland, USA, Iceland and Argentina. Despite all that, however, Stevie is most at home fishing on one of the

large Irish loughs or rivers, for Wild Trout, Dollaghan or Salmon. See also

theflyfishingpunk.wordpress.com/tag/interview-with-steviemunn/

/www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek4rkTOJ8OY For more information Email: anglingclassics@aol.com

Gun Club In Red Grouse Conservation Project

The Moore Gun Club from Roscommon approached Bord na Móna 8 years ago to talk about a potential collaborative project on Ballydangan Bog, between Athlone and Ballinasloe in South Roscommon, with the aim of conserving the Red Grouse, whose numbers were at a worryingly low level on the bog and throughout Ireland. Subsequently, 234 hectares of the bog was leased from the company to the Gun Club in 2011 and a conservation project started, which has proved very successful.

Bord na Móna began bog restoration works in 2013. This meant rewetting the bog which would lead to the development of Sphagnum-rich plant communities and the long-term restoration of raised bog habitat function. The Department of Social Protection is employing four full-time local staff whose jobs include predator control, heather cutting and habitat management. Since the project began, three pairs of Eurasian Curlew (Numenius arquata) have successfully bred on the site.

Derek Fannon reports that Minister Denis Naughten, in October, said the Red Grouse Conservation Project was an "exemplary model" of the success that can be brought about when State companies and local communities come together. Minister Heather Humphreys said Raised Bogs like Ballydangan Bog are important natural eco-systems and host a wonderful array of native species. "Bord Na Móna's work in rehabilitating this bog," she said, "and other raised bogs in Ireland is critical for the retention and diversity of Ireland's unique habitats and species." Moore Gun Club and Roscommon Regional Game Council have been influential in involving a range of stakeholders in this project (e.g. local employment through FAS and Moore Community Council, Bord na Móna, the NPWS, the NARGC Habitat Trust, the Heritage Council and NUI Galway). These unique alliances have recently led to the initiation of a number of new red grouse projects throughout Ireland.

After the end of British rule, when the great estates were restored to the Irish people, and tenants became owners of their properties, gamekeeper numbers declined rapidly and this affected the grouse population because without gamekeepers the populations of foxes, grey crows and other predators of ground nesting birds grew. There are currently about 4,000 grouse in Ireland.

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The IFSA welcomes support from Sport Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Angling Council Ireland

The Irish Federation of Sea Anglers (IFSA) would like to acknowledge the support received in recent times from both Inland Fisheries Ireland and Sport Ireland.

Through the Angling Council of Ireland we have received both financial and administrative support from these organisations leading to great advancements in our sport. Without this support it would be impossible for IFSA to host world championships and participate at U21 Team win Silver at the top level of International competition.

In recent years, the Sport Ireland 'Women In Sport Grant' has provided direct financial support for our ladies and this has helped increase participation among women, leading to multiple gold medals at International level. In addition, the provision of tackle and safety equipment through the ACI under the Sports Capital grants has gone a long way to developing our sport.

Working with the ACI we have a coaching programme and a number of CPD courses in First Aid, H&S Water Safety and Coaching People with Disabilities. Through the ACI and Sport Ireland we have training in Child Protection and Anti-doping. We have two appointed Liaison persons for Garda vetting. Our registered clubs have appointed Children's Officers who undergo Safeguard training.

The support received from state agencies and the ACI has given our sport a much needed lift and we are hugely grateful. We look forward to continuing our work with these bodies in our future endeavours.

Barbour Countrywear for Spring & Summer 2018



The Barbour Iona Quilt and Barbour Malham Jacket.

Countrywear- the heart of the Barbour brand since 1894. For Spring Summer 18, fitness for purpose is the key, in a collection that is practical, functional and stylish.

Navy and olives make up the dominant colours this season. Lightweight baffle and box gilets can be worn over a choice of check and tattersall shirts in traditional country colours with a hint of summer pink. Teflon coated cotton knitwear offers the perfect alternative to outerwear on drizzly days. For those who live, work or just enjoy the country, this collection is guaranteed to perform. www.barbour.com

Tree of the Year winner revealed

A n oriental plane tree of ancient Greek descent has been crowned Northern Ireland's Tree of the Year in a search for the nation's best-loved tree.

Organised by the Woodland Trust, the competition saw six splendid specimens1 compete for public favour, with the champion securing 1,732 votes.

The winner, the Erskine House Tree, is sandwiched between Belfast City Hospital and Queen's University Belfast and, in terms of height, could give the high-rise buildings a run for their money.

This much-loved tree is a descendent of the famous Greek 'Plane Tree of Kos', under whose shade Hippocrates, the father of medicine, taught in 500 BC. In the 1960s a young Greek doctor, Dimitrios Oreopoulos, undertook kidney research at Queen's University and Belfast City Hospital, later gaining worldwide fame for developing a form of kidney dialysis. In appreciation of his time here, Dimitrios presented seeds from the Plane Tree of Kos for planting in the hospital grounds. Only one – the Erskine House Tree – flourished and survived and is an oasis of calm and a symbol of hope for patients, staff and students.

Dimitrios' son, Dr George Oreopoulos, who recently visited the Belfast tree, said the gifting of the seed was: "A symbolic gesture of thanks from a young Greek doctor who was grateful for an opportunity. It is with this that I hope my own son learns never to underestimate the importance of small gestures of thanks that can grow into something great long after you're gone."



Pictured by the Erskine House Tree are staff and students from Queen's University, Belfast City Hospital, members of the transplant family, the Woodland Trust and members of Dr Dimitrios Oreopoulos' family, who travelled from Canada.

(Photo Parkway Photography)



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Vegan Propaganda Turns Nasty

If people wish to not eat meat, or to use animal products that is entirely their choice and one which we should all respect. For some time, however, it has been clear that many who make that choice do not have similar respect for the dietary preferences or livelihoods of others Like other areas of the animal rights movement, veganism has become an aggressive, cultish movement.

The dairy industry in particular has recently come in for levels of abuse previously reserved for fox hunters and game shooters. Dairy farmers have been accused of 'rape, murder and slavery,' attacked on social media and even subject to death threats. Worryingly many of the voices campaigning against dairy farming, although not those making the most extreme claims, are registered charities. It is, apparently, a charitable activity to campaign to destroy the livelihood of family farms and as a logical consequence remove the necessity for dairy cows to even exist.

Underlying this activity is a strange and hugely illogical set of beliefs ostensibly related to animal welfare, but actually driven by anger and misanthropy. The anti-dairy movement has as little to do with the welfare of cows as the anti-hunting campaign has little to do with the welfare of foxes. Vegans calling for an end to dairy farming on behalf of cows face the fundamental problem that dairy cows only exist because of that industry. The logical consequence of a successful outcome to their campaign is that there would be no cows, which is surely a problem for people who claim to believe that animals have rights, including presumably the right to exist.



The anti-dairy movement has as little to do with the welfare of cows.

It would be easy to make comparisons, for instance, between the environmental implications of consuming soya grown on clear-felled South American rainforests then shipped half way round the world, with those of drinking milk sourced from a dairy farm operating to high standards in the UK but that would be to miss the point. The animal rights movement is not really driven by concerns about the welfare of animals or the environment, but by a hatred of people.

Causing offence and exaggerated propaganda may fill the social media bubble but it does not convince the vast majority

who are sane and rational. Across the animal rights campaigning agenda we must remember that it is that sensible majority, not the nasty minority, who will hold sway.

Rodent Pest Control in Rearing and Managing Game Birds

A booklet entitled 'Rodent Pest Control in Rearing and Managing Game Birds' has just been published by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) Ireland.

Rats cause severe problems in game and wildlife management and controlling them is essential. The purpose of this booklet is to examine the impact of rats in game management and to describe and recommend appropriate ways of dealing with them.

Rodenticides should only be used as a last resort and not as the basis for the first approach to their control. The use of rodenticides can lead to the exposure of non-target wildlife such as the top predators; Barn Owls, Kestrels and Red Kites and there is growing evidence that such wildlife contamination is increasing. This booklet outlines best practice in rodent control and provides information and advice to gun club members and those who rear and manage game birds.

Rodents – particularly the Norway Rat – can cause significant problems at every stage of game bird rearing and management. They are voracious predators of birds' eggs and chicks. They can consume feed intended for poults and substantial amounts of feed can be lost. They can take up residence in cover crops which have been sown to provide cover and sustenance for game birds at certain times of year. Here they can feed on the crop which was intended for game birds, increase in numbers and have enough shelter to over-winter. It is also possible that they transmit diseases to the game birds they are in proximity with. It is thus essential that they be kept under control. However, this must be done in such a manner that the risk of exposure of nontarget wildlife to anti-coagulant rodenticides is minimised.



85% of Barn Owls contain rodenticide residues.

(Photo: Mike Brown)





Incorporating The Irish Game Protection Association

Countryside Alliance Ireland is a highly effective and professional rural campaigning organisation. We promote and protect all country sports interests at the very heart of Government decision-making and in the media.

Countryside Alliance Ireland is the only organisation that campaigns for and protects all country sports throughout Ireland, working closely with a broad range of partner organisations.

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Research by Birdwatch Ireland has shown that 85% of Barn Owls, for example, contain rodenticide residues, which is a cause of great concern to gamekeepers, to gun club members and to everyone with an interest in the health of our wildlife and countryside. Such contamination occurs through the consumption by top predators of rats, house mice and non-target wildlife such as bank voles and field mice that have eaten anticoagulant rodenticide bait.

Indeed, research has shown that other birds of prey such as Peregrine Falcons and Sparrow-hawks which feed on smaller birds rather than small mammals, also have extensive exposure to rodenticides. This indicates that small birds and the prey they feed on such as slugs and snails, have been able to enter bait boxes and feed on bait containing rodenticides.

The booklet deals with the two key aspects of rodent pest management – habitat management to ensure that food and cover for rats are in short supply, thus keeping rat infestations to a minimum – and, where this is ineffective or not possible, methods of conducting a responsible and effective rat control programme.

Habitat management to deter rats involves using purpose made feed hoppers rather than covered feeding stations. When feeding on the ground, only enough feed for the poults to consume should be supplied, so that there is none leftover for rats. Feeding hoppers should be at a distance from cover because open areas are less attractive to rats and indeed rat runs that may occur can be seen early and controlled before infestations build up. Relocating feed hoppers periodically prevents the build-up of gapeworm infection for gamebirds as well as forcing rats to find an alternative food source. When planting cover crops in an area where rats are known to be a problem, the planting of alternatives to seed bearing crops will help to keep rat numbers down.

To be most effective, action to eliminate rats should take place as soon as rats are observed. The use of the second - generation anticoagulants such as bromadiolone, difenacoum, brodifacoum, difethialone or flocoumafen, must be seen as a last resort as it is inevitable that some will enter the food chain and contaminate wildlife.

Shooting, trapping using cage traps and hunting with terriers are the traditional and preferred methods of rat control by gun clubs and this booklet gives detailed guidelines on their effective use. It also outlines how to conduct gassing of rats in burrows using methods such as phosphine gas generating tablets and pellets. Gassing should only be carried out by those who hold a current nationally recognised qualification in this area.

The use of anticoagulant rodenticides should only be contemplated when all other methods of control have been found to be ineffective or are impracticable. It is essential that rodenticide product label instructions for the bait used are read and carefully followed.

Primary poisoning of non-target animals including companion animals which may gain access to the bait and consume it should be prevented by careful placement in tamper proof bait boxes as described in the booklet. Secondary poisoning – where predators and scavengers may eat animals which have taken rodenticide bait – should be reduced by picking up the bodies of poisoned rodents and denying access of non-target rodents to bait points. To this end, the application of bait directly into rodent burrows is preferable as is outlined in the booklet.

Where burrow baiting is not feasible, it is essential to place bait in protected bait stations. These must be robust enough to deter dogs, foxes and badgers but it is inevitable that they will be accessible to non-target species such as bank voles, field mice, small birds and even slugs and snails. Advice is given in the booklet on how to address this by using pre-baiting practices as well as short, effective targeted treatments lasting from 21 to 35 days at most.

It is now an offence to leave out bait containing anti-coagulant rodenticide on a permanent basis, unless the baiting is done by a trained professional pest control officer using a product approved for such use in situations where re-infestation is probable and other methods have been shown to be ineffective.

It is essential that careful records are kept of all activities when conducting rat control using rodenticide baits as described in the booklet. The CRRU Code, which is supported by the rodenticide industry and by Government is printed in full in the booklet. This code involves seven steps that reflect a responsible approach to the use of rodenticides in rural areas.

The booklet – Rodent Pest Control in Rearing and Managing Game Birds - is available to download from the CRRU (IrI) website www.crru.ie and will also be distributed free of charge to all Countryside Alliance Ireland members when they renew their membership this year. (Information kindly supplied by Eanna Ni Lamhna, CRRU Ireland.)

European Firearms Passes – Know the Facts

There have been a number of incidents where people have been caught with firearms or transiting from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and vice versa, on the belief they could do so with only a European Firearms Pass (EFP).



Visitors Certificate

A European Firearms Pass allows the following: A person wishing to travel to another Member State with a firearm may so do if he or she is in possession of a European Firearms Pass and, if required, has received prior approval of the Competent Authority of the Member State to be visited.

Both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland require prior approval. NI residents travelling to the Republic with firearms to shoot require a Non Resident Firearm Certificate. If a NI resident wishes to take firearms through R of I in transit but will not be shooting, they must obtain a transit pass. ROI residents travelling to or through NI must obtain a Northern Ireland Visitor's Permit (form 30/38).

Do not forget that Countryside Alliance Ireland may act as sponsor for you to obtain your NI Visitors Certificate. For further information/to download the forms – www.caireland.org

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has stocked the following waters with takeable fish in January 2018:

Area	Date	Stocked Fish	Amount
Castlewellan	8 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Killylane	8 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Ballykeel Lower	9 January	Brown Trout	1,000
North Woodburn	9 January	Rainbow Brown Trout	1,000
Middle South	10 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Stoneyford	10 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Hillsborough	11 January	Rainbow Brown Trout	1,000
Lough Mourne	11 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Altnahinch	12 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Brantry	12 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Bellanaleck	15 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Keenaghan	16 January	Brown Trout	1,000
Meenameen	17 January	Brown Trout	500
Glencrewan	17 January	Brown Trout	500
White Lough	22 January	Rainbow Brown Trout	1,000
Lough Brickland	23 January	Brown Trout	1,000





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SNUGPAK launch a REALLY warm Gilet



The SV9 Gilet by SNUGPAK

Following a re-launch of the popular SV3 Gilet (RRP £84.95) last year, Snugpak, the UK's leading sleeping bag and insulated clothing manufacturer, has added an even warmer version to the collection - the SV9 Gilet (RRP £89.95).

An inspired innovation to Snugpak's insulated clothing collection, the SV Gilets are filled with the same exclusive Softie® Premier insulation that is used to make Snugpak's sleeping bags and insulated jackets at the manufacturer's factory based in West Yorkshire.

Snugpak's mid-layer vests are water resistant and windproof, making it the perfect garment for keep-ing warm and comfortable in a variety of situations whilst giving your arms freedom of movement.

Available in olive, black, multicam, blue and red colourways, the British made vests are great as an inner layer or as an outer when there's a chill in the air.

For further information or to buy online via one of Snugpak's preferred stockists, please vis-it www.snugpak.com or call 01535 654479.

Waterford Country Fair

Waterford Country Fair returns to Curraghmore House & Gardens in Portlaw, West Waterford, on Sunday, June 10, 2018.

The 800-plus acre estate is home to Lord and Lady Waterford and the grounds in, around and behind their ancestral home will be transformed into a Mecca for country living enthusiasts for the day-long event with proceeds again going to the worthy Make A Wish Foundation for the second year in a row.

The day-long event starts from 10am and includes jousting, sheep dog trials, poultry displays, falconry, dressage, side saddle and pony club games qualifiers for the Royal Dublin Horse Show. Fair-goers will also have a chance to try their hand at fly fishing, archery and so much more.



Alison Goff (6) pictured with her pony Buttons. The Waterford Country Fair hosts a qualifier for the pony club games at the Royal Dublin Horse Show.

FIELDSPORTS CHANNEL SHARE INITIATIVE

Fieldsports Channel has started a new initiative, which it is funding through the sale of shares in the company.

The online TV show is using YouTube, which is watched by billions, shooters and non-

shooters alike, to educate about and promote fieldsports, lifestyles and cultures across the world. Fieldsports Channel has 150,000 subscribers on YouTube and reaches around 8.5 million people across the world.

Concerned at how quickly stories such as Cecil the Lion and the Exmoor



Emperor gain credibility on the internet, with viewers' support it plans to react to fake news online and an illinformed, inflammatory media, wherever it emerges. Expansion plans include Fieldsports Australia and Fieldsports

Nordic, to go alongside Fieldsports Britain, as well as films promoting the subjects its sponsors don't usually back, such as ferreting, falconry and foxhunting.

It is using the money it raises from this share offer for programme development to support the shooting community. Visit FieldsportsChannel.tv/shares for more information.

Fieldsports Channel has previously filmed at the Great Game Fairs of Ireland - however for the THE 40th ANNIVERSARY ALL IRELAND GAME FAIR at Shanes Castle, Antrim, 23rd & 24th June 2018, it is planned for the very first time that the Fieldsports Channel Team will have their own very special stand and display at the fair.

The Fieldsports Channel will also be filming and reporting from Shanes Castle, so make sure to come along and watch all of the action - on and off screen! SUNDAY 6th MAY & MONDAY 7th MAY 2018

AH549

SHANES CASTLE MA

NOTICE TO EXHIBITORS

The organisers can only accept exhibitors who have completed and returned an Entry Form before the closing date of

TUESDAY 10th APRIL 2018

Unfortunately we will not be able to accept any exhibitors who turn up on the day without having entered and received the relevant Entry Pass.

Entry forms can be downloaded from:

or email walteramcneill@hotmail.com or ian@travanprecision.com

Cocker Spaniel Open Stake



Judges and prize winners at the Cocker Spaniel Open Stake at Castle Dobbs.

Michael Shanks reports that The Cocker Spaniel Club of Ireland held an Open Stake field trial on Monday 29th January 2018 at Castle Dobbs estate. Judges were Robin Young and Brian O'Hara.

There was plenty of game still on the ground for the end of the season. The cocker spaniels worked hard for their flushes with some good work being seen and the top dogs coming to the fore as the trial progressed

When the trial concluded competitors, judges and spectators returned to the shoot room for a late lunch, Field Trial Secretary Ken Lindsay thanked Lady Dobbs and Nigel Dobbs for allowing the club to use their estate for the trial. He then thanked Alistair Beattie, Steward of the Beat for his hard work and mentioned in particular the club's sponsors Feedwell.

Results:

1st Dashing David owned and handled by Derek Bell Jnr 2nd Barrowan Warlord owned and handled by Ian Rowan 3rd Invermuir Holly owned and handled by Billy Orr 4th Abbylara St Etienne owned and handled by Dessie Elliot COM Ferrishill Stella owned and handled by Willie Thompson

The Judges summed up by saying that it had been a most enjoyable trial to judge, all dogs in the awards were graded excellent and there had been some outstanding dog work.

(Editor's Note: I was fortunate to see this trial and was very impressed by the way that dogs were given every chance to perform at their best. It has been a long time since I enjoyed a trial so much in terms of dog work and the sheer enthusiasm and enjoyment of the handlers and spectators. Well done to everyone concerned.)

Death of Michael Higgens

A mighty icon of our sport, Michael Higgens, has died aged 76 years at Cahir, Co Tipperary.

Best known for his eighteen years in the mastership of the Tipperary Foxhounds (1973-91), where he formed a famous partnership with kennel huntsman Mickey Flanagan, he was one of the most respected figures in Irish foxhunting.

Michael's initial hunting experiences were in Hertfordshire with the Barclay family and the Puckeridge foxhounds before he spent a brief period in Australia.

A move to Ireland saw Michael become kennel huntsman to Julian Spring MFH, at the Island foxhounds in Wexford, where his frequent opportunities to hunt the hounds were very impressive doing much to raise his profile and reputation.

In 1970 Michael began a three year spell at the East Galway foxhounds

before that magical period in Tipperary. In Tipperary he built on already solid foundations by producing a top class pack showing seriously good sport while impressing and becoming firm friends with farmers and other land owners throughout the county.

His hounds not only hunted superbly they were also highly successful at hound shows in Ireland and in England while this cross channel recognition extended to Michael's appearances as a judge at leading hound shows.

Michael moved from Tipperary to Cork where he hunted the Avondhu Foxhounds in the 1992-3 season before spending six seasons, back in Tipperary, as master and huntsman of the Kilmoganny Foxhounds (1993-99). It was at this stage (1999) that he gave up the horn but continued to ride to hounds, something he with such style. His last day in the saddle was in Tipperary this season to celebrate his fifty years in Ireland.

On a personal note I remember stewarding the HANI hound show, in 2012 with Michael and Bill Montgomery as judges and listening to a very decisive and informative commentary by Michael on the day's events. I only wish I could have written down what he said!

A private cremation was subsequently followed, on 6th February 2018, by a Memorial Service in Holy Trinity Church of Ireland in Fethard, Co Tipperary.

Michael Higgens was a comsummate hound man, a superb cross country horseman and a thorough gentleman. We will not see another Michael Higgens. His loss is felt right across hunting and beyond and to Michael's long term partner Yvonne McClintock, to his sister and to the family circle everyone extends their deepest sympathy.



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- Special Funding for Grouse Projects
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- Research into Game and other species
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- Constant Government lobbying in Ireland and at EU level

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

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The Delphi Salmon Club is an exclusive 5 year syndication that is a newly designed initiative to replace the existing syndication that expires in 2018/19. This exclusive Syndication is offering 3 fishing slots per week (3/4 days, or full week) in conjunction with a Boat house cottage from March through to September. The Fishing rota is over 7 days and consists of allocated beats on The Bundorrahga River, Fin Lough and Doolough.

Each Syndicated lease has one Rod and a newly renovated Boat House cottage which can sleep 4/5 guests. The Concept is for the Fly Angler to have a guaranteed Fishing holiday on the Delphi Fishery, secured for 5 years, in addition to the attractive aspect of a Delphi Boat House Cottage, perfectly located in the west of Ireland for an annual Family holiday or hosting friends.

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WEEK 23 TO 35: SUMMER GRILSE & SEA TROUT WEEKS



WEEK 10 TO 22: THE PRIME SPRING SALMON WEEKS



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For more information please contact Michael Wade, General Manager for your information pack and brochure.

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Dublin angler Ian Mulligan has broken the Golden Grey Mullet Record

The new record, weighing 1.29 kg, was caught at Rosscarbery, Co. Cork, on the 4th of July 2017 and the Irish Specimen Fish Committee has recently ratified this new Irish record fish.

The announcement was made in the Irish Specimen Fish Committee Report 2017, which has just been released. The Irish Specimen Fish Committee, which is supported by Inland Fisheries Ireland, is an independent all-Ireland voluntary body which verifies and records the capture of large fish caught on rod by anglers in freshwater and marine waters.

As well as the new record, detailed information on 422 specimen fish (large fish) taken by anglers from venues throughout Ireland in 2017, comprising many different species, is detailed in the report. The main species were smaller shark species like Smooth hound and Spurdog and, in freshwater, Carp dominated. All fish were caught, weighed, measured and released.

The Irish Specimen Fish Committee report is available on the ISFC website www.irish-trophy-fish.com or from the Inland Fisheries Ireland website http://www.fisheriesireland.ie/. Hard copies of the report are available from Inland Fisheries Ireland offices nationally.

The ISFC Awards Day, when anglers will be presented with their awards and certificates, will be held on 17th Feb 2018 in Dublin (in conjunction with Irish Angling Show weekend:



Ian Mulligan form Dublin with his record breaking Rosscarbery Mullet.

www.maramedia.ie/irish-angling-expo). Meanwhile, anglers both at home and abroad will be reading the report carefully to plan their angling trips to catch the big fish in Ireland in 2018.

EARLY BIRD TAKES OFF FOR 30TH ANNIVERSARY GAME FAIR

10% off gate price and free gold parking

Great value ticket offers are now on sale for the GWCT Scottish Game Fair – Friday 29 June to Sunday 1 July 2018.

Celebrating its 30th year, the Scottish Game Fair (www.scottishfair.com), is run by the charity - Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) - as one of its main annual fund raisers and has become a key highlight in the Scottish events calendar, attracting over 30,000 visitors both nationally and from around the world.

Scottish Game Fair followers and countryside enthusiasts can now take advantage of the great value Early Bird advance ticket offer for this special 30th anniversary three-day event at Scone Palace in Perthshire.

On sale now, the Early Bird offer includes a 10% discount on the gate price and free gold parking (worth $\pounds12$). Two or more adult tickets and three-day tickets are also



Aerial photo showing the Fair's layout

20 Spring 2018 Countrysports and Country Life

New website unveiled to help visitors plan their day

available with free Golden Parking. These exclusive offers are available online now and tickets can be purchased from the Scottish Game Fair website www.scottishfair.com.

The 2018 Fair is set to be a year to remember, celebrating 30 years of championing the Scottish countryside and conversation. To mark the occasion, there are going to be a number of exciting new events, along with some firm favourites. The Estates Challenge is back for its second year and this year will be open to estates around Scotland and the Four Nations International Gundog competition, which was won by England last year, is set to return. The Fishing area is going to feature an enhanced programme with expert speaks and an exciting new international competition is currently being planned.

There will be lots more activities and competitions unveiled as the programme develops including a fantastic new standalone Cookery Theatre with headline chefs, cookery and baking demos.

Offering something for everyone, visitors will enjoy a packed programme of Main Ring events, 'Have A Go' activities and shopping with nearly 500 traders exhibiting the finest equipment, sporting goods, food, drink, clothing and crafts plus so much more.

For more information, please visit www.scottishfair.com or call 01738 554826.

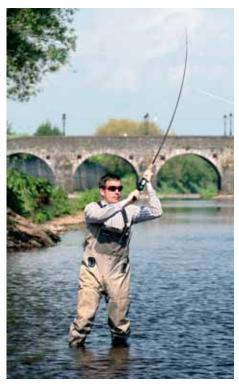
North West Angling Fair set to return with 'even bigger splash'

he fantastic North West Angling Fair is set to make an even 'bigger splash' this year when it returns on Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th April 2018 to Melvin Sports Complex, Strabane, a real treat for fishing enthusiasts all over Ireland.

Following on from the huge success of last year, the Fair is set to attract some of the UK and Ireland's top fly-dressers, casters and anglers. Operating from 10 am to 5pm each day – both inside the Melvin Sports Centre and along the banks of the River Mourne – it promises to be a great occasion for all the family to enjoy.

Visitors will have the opportunity to watch the best International Fly dressers practise their art, whilst champion fly-casters will be available to demonstrate and offer advice on fly-casting techniques and fly-fishing tactics.

Celebrity guests making an appearance include Stevie Munn, Robert Gillespie, three times World Speycasting Champion Scott MacKenzie, Andrew Toft, one of the world's leading fly casting instructors Glenda Powell, along with locally based Ladies International Flyfishing Association member Dr. Pauline McClenaghan, Jo Stephenson, the Head Ghillie at Ness Castle Lodges, Gordon Armstrong and many more. There will be daily talks and



The NW Angling Fair - a real treat for angling enthusiasts.

seminars on a number of interesting topics, including adopting a stream course for angling clubs and other interested groups, by Dr. Ken Whelan and Jason O'Riordan.

Over the two days there will be a massive range of top quality trade stands selling everything the fly angler and fly dresser needs.

The Loughs Agency are also delighted to partner with Derry City and Strabane District Council in this year's fair with a range of activities to encourage children and new participants into the sport of angling. Come along and meet the staff who will be on hand to provide assistance to anglers with their e-Licence system and answer questions on angling, development, conservation and protection of the rivers and fish in the River Mourne & Foyle systems.

Don't miss out on what promises to be a fantastic weekend of activities not just for angling enthusiasts but the whole family!

For more visit www.derrystrabane.com/ anglingfair or contact

Megan.Kelly@derrystrabane.com at the Festival and Events team at Derry City and Strabane District Council on 02871 253253.







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LASGOW ANGLING CENTRE, along with it's instore gun room Glasgow Field Sports, is without doubt a haven for shooters and anglers alike. They stock a wide range of brands and products unrivalled in the industry. All at competitive prices. Dedicated shooters and anglers travel to Glasgow from all over the UK and abroad - and it is easy to see why. With almost 30 years in the trade they know exactly what customers want to see.

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GAC has hundreds of rods and reels set up and on display for you to touch and try. You can have a go with any fly rod you like on their bespoke casting pool or even the

nearby canal basin if you want to try a salmon fly rod – by far the best way to make sure you have chosen the best tool for your needs, be it from Greys, Orvis, Guideline, Wychwood, Scott, Hardy, Mackenzie, Winston, Loop, Sage or any one of the dozens of top brands in stock. The UK's biggest range of angling apparel and waders line the walls of the clothing section from floor to ceiling, with a selection from Simms, Patagonia, Hodgman, Scierra, Airflo, Vass and many more. A huge selection of fishing flies like no other, from top manufacturers like Fulling Mill, Fario Fly, Atlantic Flies, Craig Barr, Dragon and Caledonian Flies, gives you the perfect opportunity to restock those

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depleted fly boxes with patterns for the coming months. A massive range of fly tying gear takes up a big area instore and comprehensive Sea and Coarse fishing departments are bulging with goodies from all the best known brands. GAC has more fishing lures in stock and on display than any tackle shop in Europe and has become a mecca for keen predator anglers in recent years for this very reason, with all the latest and greatest from Savage Gear, Westin, Rapala, Salmo and more. The Glasgow store is also home to Just Fish and Shoot, a fantastic range of fishing and shooting themed gifts, novelties and homewares designed to fill that gap in the market for the

man or woman that has everything check out their unique range at www. justfish.co.uk or check it out instore.

With a second store recently opened through on the east coast the busines is going from strength to strength whilst offering it's services further afield. Edinburgh Angling Centre mirrors the Glasgow store and this too includes a fully stocked gun room and comprehensive range of clothing and equipment for the discerning shooter or angler.

Both stores play host to a variety of events at various times throughout the year. In particular the Open Weekends are well worth a visit. Why not pop along and see for yourself.



Low cost delivery

Glasgow Angling Centre operates a bustling, multi award winning mail-order department, sending out hundreds of parcels every day to customers all over the world, and giving valuable advice to anglers who aren't within striking

distance of the stores. The company takes pride on realistic delivery costs. This includes free delivery to Northern Ireland and the ROI on all orders over £150. This busy service is backed up by two huge warehouses, which are both stuffed to the rafters with stock to keep both shop and mail-order customers constantly supplied. GAC really is a one-stop-shop for shooters and anglers! Seen a better price elsewhere? Our Price Match Promise makes sure you don't have to go anywhere else!



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Shooting community unites to launch new game marketing initiative – The British Game Alliance



To help promote the consumption of game and secure the future of shooting, the British Game Alliance (BGA) has been formed to act as the official marketing board for game meat. A not-forprofit organisation, the BGA is set to launch in mid-April and will act on behalf of the shooting community's best interest.

The BGA will increase the value of shot game by seeking new markets in the UK and internationally, linking consumers with processors, promoting the health benefits of eating game, and challenge public perceptions of game meat. The BGA will also operate a 'British Game' assurance scheme, which will advertise to game consumers, guns and the public that shoots are operating within the BGA's standards.

All shoots will be encouraged to register online, pay a tiered membership subscription, and agree to meet the BGA's Shoot Standards. Shoots which let days will ask paying guns to contribute to the BGA through an optional levy. All shooting-related businesses are being approached for their involvement and support as well.

The BGA will investigate credible complaints about standards on member shoots. Shoots that are found to be operating outside the Shoot Standards will have their membership and right to use the BGA logo revoked and the BGA will publish details of any complaint that is upheld.

For more information, email: info@britishgamealliance.co.uk or visit: www.britishgamealliance.co.uk

Time for 'cool heads' in pike campaign

t is time for cool heads in the pike row afflicting the great western brown trout lakes according to the Chairman of the Connacht Angling Council.

Speaking at the Council's agm, Martin Kinneavy said the Council's decision to wage a public fight to preserve wild brown trout stocks from predator pike in western lakes had proved correct.

He said the Council's approach had so far informed Fisheries Minister Seán Kyne's decision to announce that efforts are to be made to rehabilitate trout and salmon populations in the Owenriff River, a major tributary of Lough Corrib, at the expense of pike.

But he warned that further progress on protecting wild brown trout stocks from pike in the great western Loughs of Mask (Mayo), Carra (Mayo), Conn (Mayo), Cullin (Mayo), Arrow (Sligo/ Roscommon) and Sheelin (Westmeath, Meath, Cavan and Longford) and Lough Corrib must not be put at risk.

"There is no doubt but for Minister Kyne's intervention, we would be looking at a very serious and difficult situation in Lough Corrib," Mr Kinneavy said.

"The campaign to save the great western lakes remains is a work in progress.

"It is a time for patience, cool heads, and a very focused and united front, not for being steered off course by vested interests.

"We must get what's envisaged in terms of the protection of wild brown trout in the great western lakes and then plan the future of our precious waters.

"I wish to acknowledge and applaud Minister Kyne for his efforts to date, "said Mr Kinneavy.

There was broad approval for the Council's 'Save Our Wild Brown Trout' campaign, resulting in all outgoing officers being returned unopposed.

Mr Kinneavy appealed to clubs to reach out to young people to secure the future of game angling in the region. Kilcoona, Co Galway, wil host the All-Ireland Youth's Fly-tying championship on Saturday, March 10. On Saturday, March 24, the same venue is the location for an information session on the Connacht Youths' heats, which will be held on Saturday, April 7.

Over 420 Dublin young people take part in youth fishing initiative

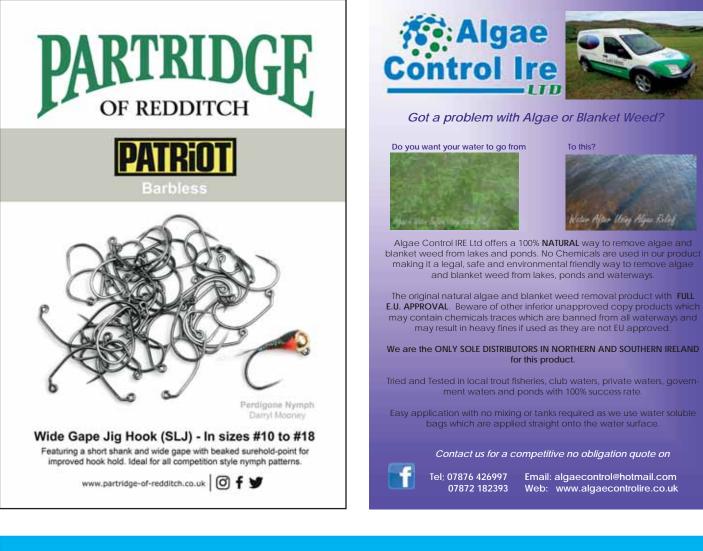


Members of Dublin's Killinarden Angling Inititative 'Fishing for Futures & Dublin Angling Inititative on Arklow's South Beach

Over 420 children and young people from the Greater Dublin Area have taken up fishing last year.

This year's programme saw them take fishing lessons, participate in fishing trips and competitions and enjoy family fishing days at various community events. Environmental talks and lessons were also held with many national and secondary schools, with summer project and youth services taking part in the programme during the summer months.

This IFI Initiative caters for anyone interested in angling, from the complete novice to the more advanced angler, with exposure given to each of the different types of fishing. Fishing presentations and tours provide an insight into fish, their habitat, conservation measures and education regarding local fishing areas. Thousands of young people have participated in the programme since its inception over 20 years ago.





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

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Book Review

The Gamekeeper by Portia Simpson

Dave McCullough reviews this autobiography by Portia Simpson, who broke into the male dominated world of game keeping and wildlife management to become the first woman in the UK to graduate from any of the UK's dedicated colleges specialising in this field.

In the book, she recounts the trials and tribulations of following her dream from childhood to become a fully qualified and successful Game Keeper and Deer stalker. She takes the reader through her journey with some earthy language, and great humour, dealing with relationships professional and personal on the way. She gives insight into the life style of those working in the field of wildlife management, vividly describing the landscapes, wildlife and the people she encountered on her way to reaching her goal, and sharing the highs and lows of life in the Western Isles of Scotland.

An informative and enjoyable read throughout, her recollections and reflections bounce the reader through a 20 year career in wildlife management, which began with wielding chainsaws as a tree surgeon, moving through her college years to working on royal and island estates as a game keeper and deer stalker and occasional hedgehog trapping in the Outer Hebrides. She concludes with her coming to terms with her medically enforced departure from hill stalking, which led to her current role in protecting and restoring the Red Squirrel population in Aberdeenshire.

Highly recommended, the book has been published by Simon and Shuster.

The GAMEKEPER

PORTIA SIMPSON

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DAERA Inland Fisheries – Building and restoring

The DAERA Inland Fisheries Community Outreach team has become a familiar sight at public angling shows and events. Most people involved in angling also knows there are Inland Fisheries office based teams, in both Belfast Headquarters and Portadown, ensuring that the administration of Inland fisheries is taken care off. There is too, of course, the Fisheries protection Officers, still referred to by many as bailiffs, patrolling the DAERA jurisdiction. As well as this, technical and industrial teams work in outstations spread throughout Northern Ireland, the Department's Movanagher Fish Farm and also the Bushmills Salmon Station. Much of the work of these teams, though often unseen, ensures the smooth running of the DAERA Public Angling Estate which offers more than 70 waters across Northern Ireland.

In addition to their many technical and fish health duties, essential to eco systems across the province, DAERA Inland Fisheries Staff work closely with local angling clubs on habitat restoration projects which enhance the prospect of current and future stocks of salmon and trout in our rivers.

A DAERA Inland Fisheries Spokesperson said, 'often the vital work of our technical teams goes unnoticed and the Department is keen that restoration and conservation work done by our officers is known so as to encourage angling clubs and groups to engage with us in this regard. These works are not only great examples of successful projects carried out, or assisted by DAERA but also a good way to showcase how the Department can engage and work with clubs for the betterment of our rivers and environment.'

Online Access to Angling – an increasing success!

The new online licence and permits sales system, introduced by DAERA Inland Fisheries in 2016, has continued to grow at a rapid rate with a majority of anglers



Habitat restoration, assisted by DAERA Inland Fisheries, at the Clady River.



DAERA and Clady Anglers – working together. now purchasing their 'e' licence from the comfort of their own home before they take up their new season's fishing. Online sales, which have increased from 23% of all sales in 2016 to 54% in 2017 have massively decreased Inland Fisheries' use of paper, saved resources within DAERA and provided a more convenient sales environment for customers according to DAERA.

Gillian Kinnier, Inland Fisheries Community Outreach and Customer Services, worked on the project which introduced the e-licence system. She told Irish Country Sports and Country Life, 'this considerable increase in online sales has brought many benefits including a reduction of footfall through our offices, allowing Inland Fisheries staff to deliver more on customer service improvements and Community Outreach projects.

The trend to online sales looks set to grow even further in the 2018 season as indications show that 67% of licence sales in January 2018 were done online.

DAERA angling licences and permits, for which prices have remained unchanged for 2018, can be purchased at www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/buy-rod-licences-permits-andriver-bush-day-tickets

Staff remain happy to answer any angling queries on 0300 200 7860

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

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Federation of Irish Salmon & Sea Trout Anglers

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Challenging conditions and uncertainty were the main issues of concern on the opening day of our salmon season on the Drowes River. The main story was the sad news announced by Minister Sean Kyne TD that a record 104 salmon rivers out of 146 were closed to taking a salmon for 2018. Later in the month, controversy erupted once again when the first salmon was apparently landed on the Kerry Flesk on the 18th January, but once again the lucky angler refused the celebrity fame and opted for anonymity leaving the official honour to be claimed by Bill Likely on the Drowes over three weeks later.

This follows the trend of fish runs

becoming later as the first salmon arrived on February 12th in 2017. We are all used to the challenging and changing conditions as we learn to adapt to flooding and the impact of climate change, but the uncertainty of the impact on the habitat is a key issue as we head into the 2018 season without our chief at the wheel. We hope that a new and more certain protection cover is put in place now by Ministers from the 19 NASCO salmon countries that would use state intervention funds.

MORE SPAWNING NEEDED

As the health graph for our salmon rivers continues to head south, with 104 of our 146 rivers



Cornamona Pier near Loch Corrib which we hope will be pike free very soon.

closed to taking a fish for 2018, pressure has reached peak for Minister Sean Kyne to intervene by listening to what anglers have said in their 130 submissions to his public consultation last November. FISSTA lobbied for a Review of the non scientific criteria being adopted that were closing rivers and reducing open ones to catch and release status. But many believe that the so called review never really happened, and if it did, it did not address the issues we sought clarification with regard to logbook returns or administration being used to close a scientifically proven healthy rivers as we continue to lose an average of 6 rivers per season from 86 in 2014 to 104 closed to taking a fish today.

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

The real tragedy is how a fisheries protection agency can justify their existence when such embarrassing statistics such as the following emerge each year without any plans to even acknowledge their failure or announcement of any plans to halt the declines such as on the Feale or our great River Moy.

How can we justify paying a national licence of €100 to an agency that refuses to acknowledge that they allowed the total allowable catch (TAC) of salmon to drop from over 4,688 to 658 over ten years giving us a loss of 4,030 salmon.

Even jewels such as the Moy River have lost a massive 10,000 fish in this short period, making it hard to justify why an average of €30m annually is spent if we are not improving our conservation of the wild Atlantic salmon results.

2018 - 104 closed to taking a fish with 42 rivers open with a surplus with 36 open to C&R

2017 - 100 closed to taking a fish 46 rivers open with 27 open to C&R

2015 - 90 rivers closed to taking a fish with 55 rivers are open and 28 open to C&R

2014 - 86 closed to taking a fish with 57 rivers open with 30 rivers open to C&R

More details on https://www.dccae.gov.ie/enie/news-and-media/press-releases/Pa ges/Minister-Sean-Kyne-announces-78-rivers-open-for-salmon-angling-i n-2018.aspx

We welcomed the exposure of some of the sharp practices in the salmon farming industry broadcasted BBC that shocked the general public and maybe some politicians. This will impact to our benefit, just like we persuaded RTE to produce a similar expose back in 2003 when our production like Scotland's was circa 25,000 tons p.a. Today, it is under 10,000 tons while Scotland's have increased to over 220,000 tons. https://vimeo.com/51718073

FISSTA'S PRIORITIES FOR MINISTER KYNE

1. PROTECTION OF OUR SALMON IN THE FEEDING GROUNDS

Our most urgent priority is to contribute our share to the Faroese buyout agreement which we have honoured and paid Mr. Orri Vigfusson, Chairman of the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF) in Iceland since 1993 from voluntary contributions donated by our clubs. The wild salmon stocks feeding in the Faroese waters are so dependent on us maintaining this agreement and that is why it is vital to obtain



First salmon caught on the River Lee River - Denis Murphy & children Sean and Ava are pictured with Denis Hoare who had arrived in time to see the fish landed.

support from our own government to protect these salmon in our feeding grounds

2. SALMON FARMING IN IRELAND

We understand that the present government support the licensing of sustainable salmon farming, but any Minister must also accept that there is no such example in existence as yet. All open sea net-cage systems are highly unsustainable as yet. The obvious choice is to seek closed contained on shore or land based as in Norway and EU countries where the technology has advanced to feasible levels to invest in without

damaging the wild fish habitat from sea-lice and diseases. We need our salmon Minister to fight harder for our wild fish by assisting us in raising the awareness for the new sea-lice roadmap agreed in 2017 between the government and Marine Harvest in Norway where net-cages will no longer be licensed in their bid to eliminate sea-lice from their fjords. In 2014, then Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD held a high powered meeting with Marine Harvest CEO Norway, along with Ministers Coveney, Joe Mc Hugh and MH Irl CEO Jan Feenstra in Government buildings and it is time to seek a review of the new and rapid changes



that impact on our stocks now. **3. PLAN TO KEEP RIVERS OPEN**

The announcement of a continued pattern of river closures is unacceptable to our Federation and we are frustrated that our submissions in past years fell on deaf ears, especially, to review the criteria why rivers were closed due to lack of logbook data. This decision was an administrative one that has no bearing on science advice which we always accept and for which we have endured the hard verdict of closure. Closing river communities and economies down for administration reasons of the IFI is self-harming to our fisheries and unacceptable to us.

4. END GWEEBARRA & OTHER RIVER TAKEOVERS BY IFI

We have campaigned to IFI and a range of Ministers over a number of years to assist us in enhance angling tourism and fishery protection by cooperating with our clubs instead of the present hostile environment in which we now work in daily. It costs Ireland's economy dearly as we believe we can double our contribution to €2billion if we were operating on a partnership basis with an interested Minister and IFI to progress hydro and dam removals to the benefit of our salmon habitat.

5. NATIONAL INLAND FISHERIES FORUM - NIFF MEETINGS

Our Federation has decided to engage with the IFI through these NIFF meetings to achieve progress. The previous NIFF was a complete failure.

6. REVIEW INDUSTRY STRUCTURE FOR PAYING ROD LICENCE AND CRITERIA FOR THE ALLOCATION OF GRANTS.

REVIEW AND CHANGE OF POLICY TOWARDS HIGH SEAS SALMON BUYOUTS IN THE FAROES

FISSTA has asked the Minister to review the long held policy of not supporting the NASF private agreements that protect our salmon in the feeding grounds.

The response to us has always been that, as FISSTA is an accredited Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) to the North Atlantic Salmon Stormy day at Lug na Dtruin Pier, Gencolmcille.

Conservation Organisation (NASCO) you will appreciate that Ireland, as part of the EU party to NASCO, addresses the issues you have raised within that Organisation.

The stock response has been that NASCO is an international organisation, established with the objective to conserve, restore, enhance and rationally manage Atlantic salmon through international cooperation taking account of the best available scientific information. NASCO conducts its business via Council (all parties and NGOs in plenary session) and via its North American Commission (NAC), North-East Atlantic Commission (NEAC) and West Greenland Commission (WGC). Ireland's interests are on the NEAC and WCG.

The main business of NEAC is control measures in Faroese waters. This area has potential to be a mixed stock fishery with many fish of Irish and European origin as a component part. However, the Commission set no allocation (fishing opportunities) for a fishery in these waters in 2017 and the Irish Chair of NEAC oversaw the securing of the agreement of the Faroese Government in 2017 to continue restraint in this regard. This is likely to be reviewed in 2018 and the Irish Delegation to the EU party will maintain its position for a continuation of the existing conditions within the context of international co-operation between all NASCO parties,

The main business of WGC is control measures on the Greenlandic fishery. This is a mixed stock area. While I understand that the majority of the stocks originate in North America, there is an increasing component of European stocks. An agreement for the years 2015-2017 limiting this fishery was made between the Greenlandic Government and NASCO parties. Ireland's NASCO delegation pressed within the EU party for limits to be imposed where prior to agreement there was poor control. This three year agreement will be reviewed in 2018. Ireland will shortly attend the WGC intersessional meeting ahead of negotiations and discussion at the

June Annual meeting of NASCO and the Irish Delegation will again continue to promote a position within the EU that limits and controls this fishery in the context of international co-operation between all NASCO parties

Ireland has, over a number of years, made a significant commitment to, and has been at the forefront, in conjunction with other parties, of the West Greenland sampling programme to review the make-up of the mixed stock and also to advise Greenland on appropriate control measures. The Irish Delegation will seek to avail of opportunities to continue this valuable work. We appreciate the concerns FISSTA have expressed and consider it important that Ireland continues to play a significant part within the international co-operation engendered by NASCO rather than unilateral action which may not be beneficial in the longer term. It is important that this sort of response is recorded as the future of our stocks surviving in their feeding grounds is the responsibility of the sitting Minister who must act if they are facing extinction due to non payment of the NASF buyout agreement of 1993. We hope to report a more positive result in the coming months as FISSTA increase the pressure on our Government to act now.

SUCCESS AT LAST ON PIKE REMOVAL FROM SOME SALMONID RIVERS

Following a long and sustained campaign by all in trout and salmon conservation, FISSTA welcomes the recent announcement in the press that Inland Fisheries Ireland will introduce a fish stock management plan on the Owenriff River in Oughterard over the coming weeks. Following a survey of the river last year, concerns were raised over the impact of introducing pike in lakes upstream of Lough Corrib. The new fish stock management plan aims to safeguard and restore trout stock in the Owenriff River, which



A good trout fishing place - Loch Aubha near Slieve League in County Donegal.

contributes 15 per cent of all wild trout found in Lough Corrib. The good news is that IFI will commence reducing pike numbers to a level where they will not impact significantly on salmonid stocks in the area.

FISSTA CONDEMNS THREATS MADE AGAINST 'GALWAY BAY AGAINST SALMON CAGES' CHAIRMAN

A group of concerned Connemara citizens who were in contact with our members were afraid to put their names to an objection to the Aquaculture Business Park (ABP) for fear of intimidation! Their fears seem to have been completely justified, for as soon as the objection was published on the Galway County Council planning website the chairman of GBASC received threats on Facebook.

FISSTA AGM SUMMARY REPORT

The FISSTA AGM was held in the Shamrock Lodge Hotel Athlone on Sunday 26th November 2017 with a good spread of delegates in attendance.

The opening statement from Chairman Paul Lawton highlighted progress from Norway on the sealice and fish farming issue as it is still the biggest threat to our wild salmon angling and is rightly at the top of our agenda with the closing of our rivers without a reopening plan being the second biggest threat to our salmon survival.

The AGM agreed that the new NEC engage more robustly with Inland Fisheries Ireland to convey the grave concerns of our AGM delegates regarding the slow pace of progress on the adoption of the Norske Industri fish farm plan.

As other supporting salmon groups had faded away and no longer campaign with us at relevant events, it was agreed that Galway Bay Against Salmon Cages & FISSTA must continue to maintain the front line role in opposing the national plan of the 46 designated salmon farms on the map for development.

The GBASC was commended once again and delegates stated that they had to be supported as they, through their Chairman Billy Smyth especially, were doing a great micro/local job on the local press and national media that complimented the macro FISSTA campaign. However, many at the meeting felt that after hearing of the most difficult engagement our team experienced at the ALAB -Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board in Bantry. It was agreed that we must increase the pressure further.

The failure of IFI to communicate on strategy at ALAB let alone support us has put our voluntary organisation at great disadvantage as it means we do not have sight or knowledge of their strong rebuttal information that could equip us to lodge the strongest possible objections in the future.

It was debated as to whether this was a reasonable request from FISSTA to a state body such as IFI and the general feeling was that it was, as it is anglers who support and finance their operations annually.

The NEC were disappointed to realise that our input is not sought from state bodies and it was agreed to give the National Inland Fisheries Forum one last 12 months chance to be radical or become redundant as the effort to attend and contribute has been a waste of our resources to date.

There was unanimous agreement for all FISSTA clubs to mobilise their efforts in a coordinated campaign to protect the wild Atlantic salmon from extinction and to return our closed rivers status to open as soon as possible, and in that aim, it was noted that several delegates criticised the FISSTA NEC for not pursuing the Minister Kyne review which he announced last January.

The Chairman claimed that the difficulty lay with IFI seemingly ignoring much of what the Minister was attempting to do to progress angling and salmon and the present Galway Weir controversy was proof of what he is up against. He acknowledged that the wild salmon and seatrout are heavily dependent on the IFI as a line of state defence to ensure that the valuable natural resources of inland fisheries and salmonid angling in particular are conserved, managed, developed and promoted (and not wiped out) in their own right to generate positive return for each river's local community and the environment.

The new value put on angling to the state of €750m compared to the IFI value of €150m confirms how undervalued the state views our resource and sadly no action or attitude change is evident for the past three years since it was received from TDI. It was agreed that FISSTA must go direct and take our business model to the politicians if we are to succeed in the future of our sport.

The PRO Noel Carr reported on a busy year of press and publicity with special thanks to Albert Titterington and Paul Pringle for their generous coverage of our work and support at Shanes Castle and Birr Castle game fairs.

The Treasurer Donal O' Doherty reported a modest balance and outlined the increased level of work undertaken to oppose the fish farm plan which required every possible Euro be used to keep fighting other new licence applications now that the Coveney plan on Galway Bay was withdrawn.

The NEC were elected and outgoing Chairman Paul Lawton was re-elected unopposed to the full satisfaction of the meeting. The meeting concluded at 2.30 as per agenda.

Hooked early on fishing!

The beginning of our season here on the Munster Blackwater brings us a little time to ponder. For me it's an exciting time, as the countryside around me slowly starts to wipe icy winter's sleep from its eyes, revealing a little more magic, wonderment and life every day.

I find each year that I feel the tingle in my toes, you know, the feeling you got when you were a child and were given the news that a day's fishing would soon be here. You find it so hard to contain your excitement and ultimately resort to pestering your parents as to the whereabouts of your equipment, which hasn't seen the light of day since the end of last September. This draws a comparison between our angling journey and the journey a river takes.

A quick scan through my son's geography book confirms the knowledge hidden deep in my subconscious from my own school days: a rivers journey has three stages. Youthful: direct, forceful, erosion; Mature: meanders, some erosion, deposition; and Old Age: slowing, deposition, destination.

The youthful stage of our own fly

fisher's journey is all action, just like the river. We crash and bash our way down the valley in an uncompromising fashion and sometimes we get a little wet. We are young, we are fresh, we are here!

Liam Davis, one of our youngest and avid anglers describes so well this particular youthful stage in his essay, entitled 'My Fishing Life.'

"I was four when I started fishing. My first fish was a small whiting off a pier. After that fishing trip I decided that I liked fishing. The reason we were at that pier was because my Dad was a sea fisherman. We live near a river in Galbally. We collected worms from our garden and used them to catch trout and that was how I started river fishing. Then my Dad and his friend Lee bought a boat so we started boat fishing. I remember once, we were catching whiting three at a time.

"My first time salmon fishing was on

<image>

Getting into the action - Liam bends the rod with a cast.

the Moy about three years ago. We brought Lee with us then too. After that we went back to boat and beach fishing for a while. But then one day my Dad went to the Blackwater to fish Glenda's beat at Kilmurry. He caught a six pound salmon that day. So he went back again and caught another salmon and he decided we would fish there for the rest of season.

"I hooked my first salmon last year on a purple and copper flying C. I was so excited that I wound it up too fast and the next thing I knew it was under the rod tip. It shook its head and threw the hook and swam away. I was very disappointed but kept on fishing. Although I didn't get another salmon in my first year, I did get lots of trout.

A difficult wind cast and next thing - a fish!

"This year though, I did much better I had two salmon and a sea trout. My first salmon was a ten pound kelt. It was almost as tall as me! A kelt is a salmon that has already spawned and hopefully is on its way back to sea. I caught it on a black and silver flying C in front of the hut on Glenda's Kilmurry beat, on a very windy, wet February day. It was so windy that my spinner was coming back at me sometimes when casting. It was really annoying, even Lee was getting annoyed. I complained to Lee once, but after that cast I complained about came the cast which I caught my salmon on. When I hooked it I thought it was only a trout. Again I wound it in too quickly, so my Dad told Lee to get the salmon. He tried to grab the leader so my Dad shouted to him not to, and he tailed the

fish instead. That was my first salmon. Lee is always saying I stole his salmon because I was fishing beside him and cast where he was casting but I caught it fair and square!

"The second salmon I landed was a five pound grilse on my Dad's fly rod. I didn't hook it but my dad let me land it so I knew what it felt like on a fly rod. It didn't take too long to bring in and this time I fought it properly by not winding it straight in. The second salmon I caught by myself was a three pound grilse, which I got at Glenda's Ballyhooly beat on a red and copper flying C that Noel gave me. We don't normally fish at Ballyhooly, but Kilmurry was too coloured to fish as it had been raining lots.

"Almost every cast I felt something knock against my spinner and I thought it was the bottom so I wound it in a bit quicker and then all of a sudden I had a salmon on. I shouted for my Dad to come and help and he tried to run down to me in chest waders and chest high water and he nearly fell in. It was very funny for me but not for him. It fought very well. We had to keep this one because it's eye got badly damaged by the hook. When it was gutted and filleted my Dad cooked some for us to try in butter and it was the best salmon I had ever tasted.

I am still learning how to fly fish, but I am sure I will be better next year. My Dad filled his licence fly fishing this year and caught some very big fish. When my Dad caught his big fifteen pound salmon, I was amazed about how big it was. I got my double handed fly rod for Christmas, it is a switch rod. I practised in the garden quite a lot. I really like fly fishing. I find it quite fun. My first fish on the fly was a baby salmon called a smolt and my second fish on the fly was a dace. I also caught a sea trout on the last day of the season, which was probably the last fish on Glenda's beats of the year, as it was nearly dark when I got it. Sea trout are like small salmon, they look quite similar and they feel the same on a rod, but they jump around a lot.



All smiles Liam for with a fine kelt.

You only have your salmon when it's in the net

"Fishing is about patience you cannot expect to catch a fish every cast. But eventually you are rewarded with a fish. Salmon are good fighting fish you cannot just bring them in as soon as they hit. You have to tire them out just enough to get them to the net. But when it is in the net then but only then you have your salmon.

"I like fishing because it gets you away from stuff like your phone and you are surrounded by nature. We have seen mink, foxes, otters and bats. Also you meet lots of nice people. I love Glenda's beats on the Blackwater because you get very well looked after and it is always stuffed with fish. Glenda and Noel are really nice and Glenda owns some of the best beats on the Blackwater. She has helped me with my casting sometimes and Dad said he will get us some lessons before next year starts. Glenda normally turns up at 9 o'clock with tea and coffee and she always robs our biscuits and mini rolls! We don't mind though, because sometimes Glenda or Noel will give you a fly or a spinner to help out. I can't wait for next season to start but we have been doing some fishing in the winter. I won a competition for the second time last week. When I am older I would like

to go to Sweden to hunt some Baltic salmon with my Dad."

I think Liam sums up so well the excitement and enjoyment that many of us have felt when we first set out on our own fishing journey. If you are reading this and have yet to 'wet a line,' why not come along and have-a-go yourself!

Glenda became a World Champion in 2006 when she won the Overhead Salmon Distance Casting Competition for women at Carton House. An avid fisher, Glenda is a natural teacher with a gentle approach to helping people through some of the more difficult steps on the way to becoming a proficient caster.

She is one of the highest qualified female salmon fly casting instructors in the world having achieved the APGAI-Ireland both Double (salmon) and Single handed certifications to the highest levels. She is currently Chairperson of this association and is one of the lead examiners for new instructors.

To book fly fishing tuition or guided fishing on the River Blackwater: Tel: +353 (0)87 2351260 E: info@glendapowellguiding.com

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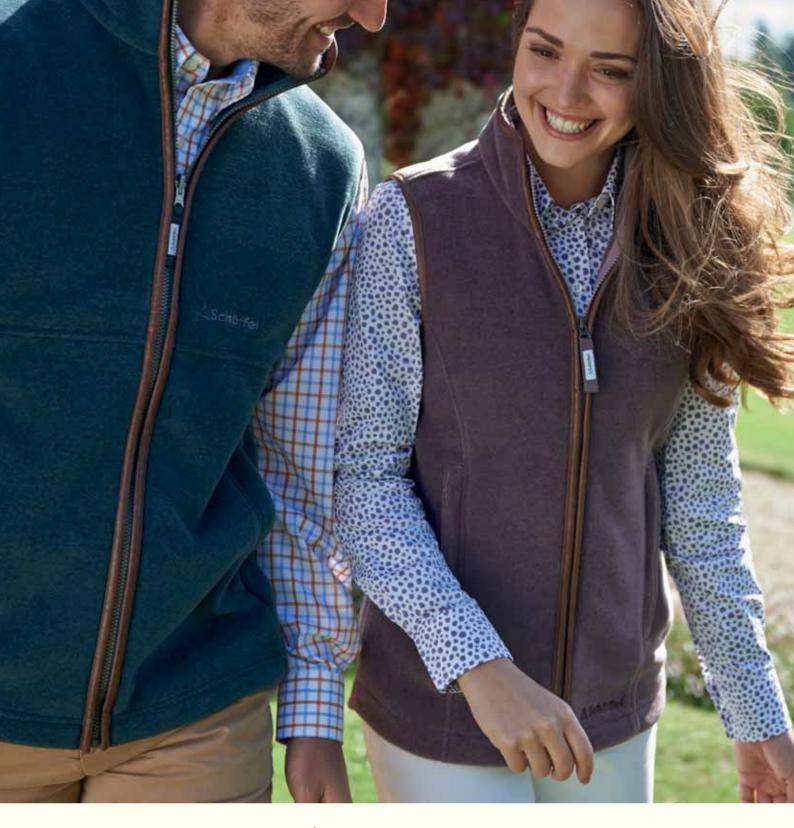


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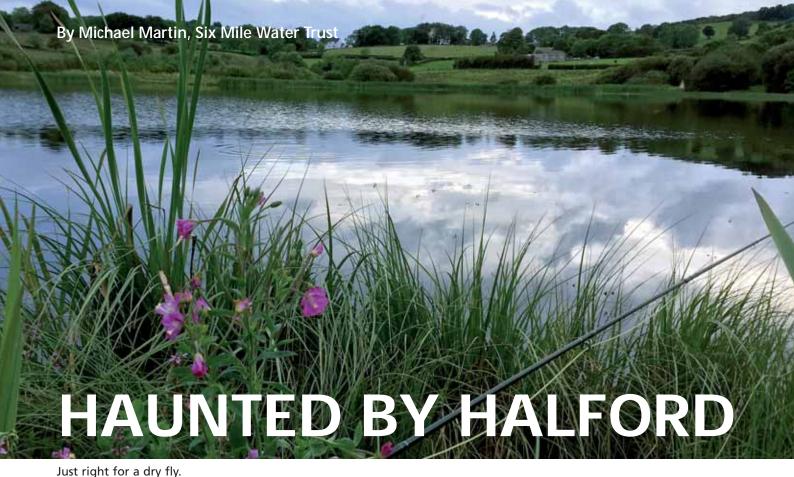
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Just right for a dry fly.

Bright green fronds of water crowfoot wave in the cool crystal water, where the Doagh burn joins the Six Mile Water. It's early April in the late 1970s and the cold winter winds have at last abated, now the gorse and primroses add colour to an otherwise barren landscape.

I crouch beside the pool watching for signs of life but the only activity is a pair of our earliest nesting bird, the Dipper, as they bob and dive in the bubbling streams. I've tried wet flies for a while but to no avail, so now I sip coffee and enjoy being by the river as the weak midday sun breaks through bringing some warmth to the day.

Suddenly a wagtail flits off the blackthorn tree beside me, deftly catches a hatching olive and quickly returns to its perch before repeating the performance a few minutes later. Below the surface the Spring Olive nymphs are stirring in the weed and amongst the stones, making ready to hatch in the streams.

A swirl on the surface betrays a feeding trout. I watch transfixed as the hatch begins, the olives become more numerous and soon more trout join the first, nudging the surface, spotted sides flashing under the surface as they move to take the emerging flies.

I unhook the Greenwell's Glory from the keeper ring to cover the nearest

trout, but my excitement turns to despair as my wet flies are spurned by those beautiful trout and I succeed only in putting some of them down. I know that a dry fly is required but have only seen it practised in the 'Out of Town' programme with Jack Hargreaves and read about it in some of my fathers old 'Trout & Salmon' magazines.

The trout continue to rise now more vigorously and some their larger brethren have joined the party, causing large whorls to appear in the streams and my young hands start to tremble as I fumble for the little green tin of Mucilin to float the fly line, the bottle of liquid Mucilin to anoint the fly and eventually a treasured possession, a matchbox size cardboard box with Joseph Bradell & Son printed on the side and containing the sacred dry flies.

Carefully opening the box so that the contents don't blow away I study the immaculately tied flies with awe, eventually picking the one which best matches the natural flies now streaming off the water. Tying it to the leader I admire the lovely hackles and perfectly matching wings. Giving the fly a onceover with the little Mucilin brush, I scan the water while waiting for it to dry, noting where the better trout are holding in the current.

With wings cocked upright

Eventually it's time to make the cast but my first trout vanishes as a bungled cast drops the fly clumsily on its head. The next trout is rising steadily midstream just where the streamy water flattens into the pool, I throw a few feet upstream of its position and the little dry fly rides high on its sparkling hackles, the wings cocked upright for all the world looking like a little sailing ship, just like the natural duns around it.

I watch entranced as it floats toward the ring of the last rise and, as if in slow motion, a neb pokes through the surface, the fly vanishes in a little splash, a reflex strike and suddenly I'm playing my trout which bolts for the sanctuary of the deep water down below. I stumble down slippery stones



The Large Dark or Spring Olive, Baetis Rhodani normally the first flies to bring river trout to the surface.

on the bank trying to protect the delicate tippet from the throbbing runs of the trout. The fight continues down the pool but the trout begins to tire, I feel for the net and eventually draw my prize over it's meshes and lift him clear of the water.

Fully a pound and in pristine condition, I spend a while admiring my prize. So many sensations run through my head at that moment: pride, relief, satisfaction, excitement and the knowledge that I had at last achieved an ambition of catching a trout on a floating fly, the realisation that I had uncovered the mystery of the dry fly, in my young teens. I couldn't wait to tell my mates in the school fishing club. Even better, once I'd calmed down, trout were still rising and I'd have all afternoon to catch some more. That was my indoctrination into the school of the Dry Fly, it's so clearly etched in my that first trout on the dry fly.

There are so many dimensions to dry fly angling; the visual aspect, the anticipation of the rise, studying the insects, the hatch or fall of fly, the stage that trout are taking the hatching fly emergers, duns and spinners— the casting skills in avoiding drag and precision, recognising rise forms, all of these combine to make fishing the dry fly an engaging, fascinating and exciting way to catch trout.

Dry fly fishing s pure enjoyment, nothing more

It's easy to see why some may see the method as the best way to catch trout, but there's no excuse for being pedantic or engage in the snobbery associated with the method. The old Halfordian dry fly code is a little puritanical for my own taste even though I love the method above all others. An angler may be as snooty or snobbish as he likes about fishing the dry fly, but that's not our way in Ireland and for myself and those who I know who fish dry flies, it's simply because we find it the most enjoyable method of catching trout. I don't even get the arrogance of the Halfordian brigade, there are more skilful ways to angle for trout and if an angler were to wait for the trout to focus solely on

hatched duns on most rivers he'd have a long wait. No, for me the attraction of fishing the dry fly is pure enjoyment, nothing more.

The draw of dry fly angling covers many aspects, it can be as complex or as simple as you make it, an angler can become absorbed in studying entomology, fly tying, buy equipment incorporating space age technology or he can fish a handful of tried and trusted patterns on an old cane rod built before he was born. There is a mountain of literature to read on the subject and some very excellent books though much of it contradictory through its ambition to aspire to Halfordian principle of highly selective, educated trout, only to be cast at while taking only fully hatched duns and only of a certain species at that.

In 1889 Frederick Halford produced a book, 'Dry Fly Fishing - In Theory And Practice' which formalised a code of how a dry fly should be fished and though challenged by many excellent authors since, its ideology reverberates through angling history to this day and though many of the views may be somewhat controversial there is a great foundation of sound advice, the lively debate still rages about some aspects of Halfords ideology but this is thought provoking and educational. Ernest Schweibert (Matching The Hatch), Swisher & Richards (Selective Trout), Clark & Goddard (The Trout And The Fly), John Roberts (To Rise A Trout) are



Taken on a small dry fly at dusk.



Stillborn olives trapped in the surface film are vulnerable to trout.

but a few follow in his wake and their books explore the nuances of the dry fly philosophy.

Present the fly where the trout expects it

I adhere more to the author Bob Wyatts approach to dry fly angling: identify the stage of insect that the trout is taking and offer it an approximate match: GISS, general impression of shape and size. The fly must be presented where the trout expects it to be; an emerging dun stuck in the surface film, a fully hatched dun riding high on the surface, a sedge struggling and awash or a black gnat hopelessly stuck in the meniscus. I've followed the perfect imitation approach, even tying Clarke & Goddards Upside Down pattern which conceals the hook barb but we can never really closely imitate a natural fly.

From my hunting experience with other animals, hawks and dogs, I know that they quickly recognise triggers, acquire a search image that they expect to see, they also quickly recognise an animal which acts unnaturally, maybe wounded or ill and establish instantly that it is weak or vulnerable. Bringing this to my angling, I try to present the trout with an offering that it's expecting to see and behaving as the natural would do, a general impression rather than a perfect imitation.

Over the years of angling and kicksampling I've noticed that many up-wing flies and sedges are taken by the trout whilst in the process of emerging. At this stage they are vulnerable and easy prey, many never actually emerge fully anyway, their wings fail to expand and they are swept along stuck in the surface, we call them 'stillborns' and in a big hatch the trout can focus selectively on these stranded easily captured flies.

I still love the traditional flies, Kites Imperial, Greenwell's Glory, Adams and Rough Olive, etc., but increasingly I use patterns incorporating CDC feathers, snow shoe hare or elk hair, patterns which sit in the surface film rather than on it to imitate the emerging dun rather than the fully fledged fly which the trout doesn't actually have much opportunity to catch before it flies off. Deer hair and CDC emergers are generally my first options in an appropriate size and colour, Elk Hair Caddis cover the sedge fly options and the Wulff patterns cover larger flies such as the Mayfly. These flies are easily tied, effective and will catch trout in rivers and still-waters across the country, obviously some specialised patterns are required for some situations such as caenis, black gnat, ants etc but my general impression patterns tend to be more effective for me than the

standard Classic dry fly.

So if you've never tried it before, been put off by the snobbery and mystery of dry fly angling, then it's time to give it a go. You'll find it's not half as hard as it's made out to be and it's a very deadly and satisfying method of catching trout. You may use lighter and more sensitive tackle, generally a nine foot four or five weight rod with matching fly line and a lightweight reel will give a delicate presentation and give great sport even with smaller trout but will still subdue larger specimens that you will encounter.

Fishing the dry fly gives me such pleasure and because it's so visual, you can identify the hatching fly, read the water, identify the rise, match the fly and anticipate the take before it even happens. Be warned, this form of angling is highly addictive and lessons learned on the river can be applied to any fishing venue from small Put & Take Fisheries to still-waters and wild loughs - there are buzzers, sedges, olives and mayflies to be imitated and many of the better trout on the big loughs are caught on dry flies during the season. Certainly there's a great satisfaction of tying your flies and catching trout on the surface, the emergers are so easy to tie and so effective that they're my 'go to' fly for most situations now days though I might have some explaining to do if I ever meet Halford in the next world!



Emerger patterns - possibly enough here to make Halford turn in his grave.





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Early success with a dry Large Dark Olive.

My fishing season begins in March and the rain is beating at my widow at the time of writing. I have endured the long cold winter, whose monotony has only been broken by a few angling shows that I have worked at, that just fuelled my appetite, making me want to go fishing even more. Very soon I shall be out fishing for wild brown trout in my local streams and rivers and my world will be filled once more with fishing, flies and all matters piscatorial.

The early part of the season is often difficult, but if you are very lucky you will get a hatch of *Baetis rhodani*, the Large Dark Olive (LDO). When this happens the sport for a few hours can be very good indeed.

The LDO is an insect of flowing water and it can live in steep stoney streams as well as in weed-rich chalk streams; the adults can be seen during the cold months of late autumn, winter and early spring, when few other flies are about.

My advice is to try and time your arrival on the river to coincide with the warmest part of the day, difficult I know at the early part of the season. I normally aim to get to the river about 11. 30 as I know that my best time for a hatch which should be from noon until about 2. 30 pm perhaps an hour later on a milder day. For me this would be on my local river the Six Mile in Co. Antrim, a river which I guide on. I sometimes call this 'the trout's opening hours', so you would think that's it, it's easy just turn up at the right time and bingo you're in but unfortunately that's not always the case.

One problem can be Large Dark Olives (LDO) can at times be slightly unpredictable and often localised. So the angler's problem is to decide whether to stick with a place you know has worked in the past hoping it's going to happen, go looking on other stretches of the river. This can be time consuming in your short window of opportunity, but there may be a hatch and trout are feeding on them. Normally I try about three hot spots I know and hope that one of them pays dividends and if one is going OK then I stay in that area and try to make the most of it.

The dry fly is my favourite way to fish at this time of season, but if you don't get a hatch of Large Dark Olive, it can be very hard and you may be better using the wet fly or a streamer or you might get more productive fishing with nymphs, depending on your water conditions of course. A good nymph to try when imitating LDOs is the Pheasant Tail Nymph. Sometimes you need to get down deep, as the trout can be hard on the bottom and this is when nymphing with heavy flies can often produce results. In the last few years, tungsten-beaded flies have become a revelation in getting you down to those fish, when they are not feeding on the top. These heavy flies in different sizes can work very well fished on a dead drift, in Czech or French nymphing style or, in smaller rivers with less flow, by casting upstream and trying and keep in touch through the fly line.

You can see a photo to the right of my first wild Brown Trout of the season past, not the biggest fish I ever caught, but it's great to get your first few trout of the year no matter what size it is. They took my dry Dark Olive and they to me are just wonderful, see the pattern below. It is a great fly and one I use when trout are eating Large Dark Olives. I hope you dress some and they work for you.

Here is what you will need to tie one for yourself

Silk. Nano Silk Copper

Hook. Partridge Dry Fly Supreme size 16-14

Tail. Fibre Barred Olive Body. Peacock Stripped Quill Olive. Wing. CDC.

Hackle. Dark Olive. (sometimes I use natural red that works well on my local river)



The trout took confidently and was well hooked.

Let's talk a little about some basic tactics and the dry fly on rivers. An artificial dry fly that copies or imitates something that the trout are feeding on is cast at rising fish, normally, but you can also use a dry fly to search the water for fish and often I do this casting at likely looking spots I know trying to make a trout rise. I am amazed how often I have brought up trout to a dry fly when no fish are rising. The best way to do this is to cover a lot of water, moving slowly upstream working the whole way up a stretch.

The fly is cast or presented to a fish in a way that the fish is unaware of the



Dark Olive Quill (Stevie Munn)

angler in the stream or any casting action he or she is making, we are trying to get our fly to behave like a natural food item or to give the impression to a fish that it is edible. The American fly fishing master Lefty Kreh, whom I met last year in the USA while working at an angling show, understood the importance of this as he explains in his excellent book, 'Presenting the Fly,' which is well worth a read.

So, what does presenting a dry fly on a stream or river mean in real terms? Well, the first lesson to being successful is try to be very stealthy in order not to scare or alert the fish. This may be achieved by casting to rising fish at long range or by using the correct light equipment. I like the excellent Marryat range of rods for my river fishing with a 9' # 4 or the new versatile 9'6" #3/4 being a great choice for the dry fly river angler in Ireland. If fishing big river like I do in Norway I love the Marryat Tactical 10' #5 or indeed if you fish small streams a smaller rod like 8'or 8'6'' maybe better.

Try to concentrate on being stealthy as this will help you catch more. Always walk softly, as fish are as sensitive to noise and vibration as they are to visual warnings. Walking lightly on the river banks and trying to wade slowly and quietly are very important tactics.



Sunset is a magical time for anglers later in the season.

Remember you are trying to fool a wild animal that you are not around.

I recall when I was fishing when I was very little, possibly as young as 7 or 8 years of age, my father taught me a valuable lesson about being stealthy. I was excitedly running along the river bank while we were fishing, so he shouted at me telling me off, 'move slowly' he shouted, 'walk lightly, trout can hear!' I thought he was mad trout, don't have ears I have seen them, I did not know back then about lateral lines, which is the sense organ fish use to detect movement and vibration in the surrounding water.

Later that night while I was having a bath my father came in and asked me to put my head under the water momentarily while he banged the side of the bath with his hand. The noise really surprised me and I could feel vibrations in the water as well. Coming up for air I knew exactly how trout hear and feel vibrations too. I am not saying you half drown your children when teaching them to fish, but that lesson stuck in my head and it made me catch more trout. So be quiet and cast as light as you can for it's one of those little things which add up to make a good angler into a great one with the dry fly, or for that matter any sort of fly fishing.

Also, use camouflage or dull clothing to match the background. Use a fly

pattern that copies surface flies that fish are feeding on (matching the hatch as anglers call it) or try an attractor dry fly to pull up a fish (usually when no hatch is apparent) and you can boost your chances if it behaves in a natural and enticing manner.

For good dry fly presentation it is often better if the tippet (the material usually a nylon/co-polymer/fluorocarbon onto which the fly is tied) actually sinks. However, the fly line and leader should float, if not they would act to pull the dry fly under the surface.

The dry fly must be cast and fished to copy the behaviour of natural insects. Many of these insects sit motionless on or in the surface film of the water and are carried naturally by the stream, to the trout. To copy or imitate these insects that are riding on the surface currents, the angler must present casts with enough slack in the line, leader and tippet to ensure that the fly is not dragged back unnaturally. Fly fishers therefore try and eliminate drag, caused mostly by the currents in the river and the fly line or leader and tippet dragging, we almost always aim for a drag free drift. The drift is the distance the fly travels downstream without dragging.

When presentation is good and the fly is drag-free the trout will sometimes — and I stress sometimes — be fooled. These casts are easily learnt and are made by mending your line and by moving your rod tip. Here is a blatant plug anyone looking lessons for these and many other casts please email me, if I don't live near I can give you the name of a qualified instructor.

Using a dry fly is one of the most enjoyable forms of fly fishing and perhaps still my favourite method. There is nothing better than casting a dry fly on a river, and watching a trout rise to it. It's exciting, beautiful and visual and when cast coaxes a trout to rise and that trout actually takes, what could be better. Tight lines for 2018.

Fishing Matters Game Angling Consultant Stevie Munn works full time in angling as a qualified and insured fishing guide, writer and game angling instructor. He has also appeared in many angling books, magazines and DVDs and gives casting demonstrations at angling events all over the world. He has fished many places in the world and grew up fishing on rivers and loughs of Ireland where he often guides. He runs teaching courses in Ireland and host groups to fish in Norway, Argentina and other parts of the world. You can contact him via email anglingclassics@aol.com and for more information visit www.anglingclassics.co.uk

A Pike On The Fly

I was casting a line as the sun rose.

Once the trees have fully shed their leaves our pike fishing is in full swing. The temperature drops and the pike start to feed avidly, building up their strength in readiness for spawning in the spring. With the evenings drawing in and the weed dying off casting a fly for pike becomes easier. There is nothing more frustrating than getting weeded every cast, so with clearer water the fly fisher has a much greater chance of getting a fly in front of a feeding fish.

Heading out before dawn on a day when the frost lies thick on the windscreen and the grass crunches underfoot to try to intercept a toothy critter with more than 700 teeth using nothing more than a fly rod and a few hooks adorned with a bunch of feathers and tinsel could be one of the first signs of madness, but that is what the keen fly piker does. The week before the boats were lifted out of one of my club waters it had been bitterly cold, but a few days of milder weather offered a great chance of seeing some pike activity and the last chance I would get to use the boats this season. It would be April before they were relaunched.

With only fly gear to take packing is easy: I take a rucksack with fly wallet

and box, spare wire traces and leader, spare spools for changing lines, flask, flapjacks, long nosed pliers and finally the all important, knotless mesh net. I only took the one rod set up with an intermediate line, this is the one I use the most as the lake is an old gravel pit and is only about 12 feet deep in the middle, counting the cast down for about 10 seconds puts me well into the taking zone and just above any weed that is still standing. For shallower, or deeper, water I just adjust the count accordingly.

With the sun still below the horizon I pushed the boat out from the dock and rowed quietly over to a corner close to a reed bed where I know there is a bit of a drop-off. I was going to try here first as

it gave me a variety of depths within casting range and small fish tend to gather in this area too, so there are often pike in the area.

As the boat glided quietly into my spot I readied the anchor and lowered it gently over the side, using the drag to slow the boat. I hate it when people just throw an anchor overboard, you can hear the splash and the rattle for a mile across the water, imagine what it sounds like to any fish close by!

Silver flashabou on a 6/0 hook

I let the rope down by lowering it, hand-over-hand until I felt it touch bottom. This also gives me a great idea of the depth of water as I count the



A variety of pike flies.

number of feet I let out between my hands. I was anchored in about 10 feet, so absolutely perfect. I let the boat settle while I picked up the rod and selected a fly. I went for a mainly yellow one with plenty of silver flashabou for the tail about 7 inches long on a 6/0 Sakuma Manta hook. These saltwater hooks make brilliant hooks for pike flies.

With the sun just creeping over the trees, I made my first cast. It always takes a couple of casts to get the line off the reel, or at least it does the way I like to do it. This is no real detriment as it allows one to fish close to the boat first and gradually extend the radius of cover. I tend not to cast in the same direction more than a couple of times, preferring to fan cast and keep the fly working in different columns of water.

After a dozen or so casts I put a line out towards the reeds, I know it is only about 4 feet deep close in and the bottom drops away from the side, so as the fly landed I gave it a count of 3 before beginning to retrieve in short, hand width draws. With a few yards retrieved I let the fly sink again for another count of 5 this time, and then continued the retrieve, every few pulls Perfectly hooked for catch and release.





A fiesty pike headshakes on the surface.

stopping and letting the fly drop for another couple of seconds. About half way back to the boat, the line suddenly went taught as I tugged the fly, then the head shaking began, fish on!

Slack taken up, I could play the fish on the reel

I held the line tight and allowed the fish to set the hook as it dived against the resistance. Then, with the rod hooped right over I had to let line slip through my fingers under control while I wound in slack line through my little finger and the ring finger of my right hand. With the slack taken up I could now play the fish using the drag on the reel properly. I much prefer to play a fish on the reel, for one thing it means there is no slack line to get tangled and cause problems, plus the drag is smoother than my fingers grabbing onto the line.

After a couple of really spirited runs the pike broke surface, I could see it hooked perfectly in the front of its jaw, but that also means you have to be careful when the fish gets acrobatic beside the boat as the barbless hook can get thrown, it is a balancing act between keeping enough pressure on the line to hold the hook in and being soft enough to give the fish flexibility. Sure enough, as it came close to the boat the pike went wild, as expected, thrashing the water to foam as it powered away. The next time it came up I slid the net under it and lifted it over the gunwale. Yes!

It wasn't a big pike, they don't have to be; it was nicely conditioned though and was very welcome. I am not a specimen hunter who looks down their nose at anything under 20lbs as being a nuisance. I am quite happy to enjoy catching these, even a 5 pounder puts a smile on my face. Of course it is nice to catch a big fish from time to time, but catching pike on the fly is about enjoyment rather than bragging rights. I caught another, two casts later, the same sort of size. It made for a lovely few hours on the water.



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Terrier, Lurcher & Whippet Show Roundup Dessie Mackin's Dog Show

Bannville House Hotel is set in 13 Acres of mature woodland on the Lurgan Road, three miles from Banbridge, and deep in the heart of the County Down countryside. These beautiful surroundings were the venue for Dessie Mackin's annual Christmas Dog show

Although it was cold Christmassy weather, this did not dampen the spirits of the good men and women of the canine world, all out for a good day's enjoyment and festivities. I can honestly say, being at all of Dessie's Christmas shows over the years, this year's on Saturday 16th December had the biggest turnout so far.

From mid morning cars, vans, and trailers were arriving, loaded up with their prized canine friends. This Christmas show is a welcome break from the trials and tribulations of Christmas shopping and all the razzmatazz that goes with this time of year.

Showing commenced at approximately 1.30.

Results:

Children's Handling Class Chelsea Rafferty with Rosie Logan Hepburn with Joe Lewis Johnstone Champion Puppy Lisa Hanratty with Dakota; Reserve Carol Brown with Portia Champion Whippet Janet Duke with Oscar; Reserve Leeroy McCullough with Tizer **Champion Lurcher** Lisa Beggs with Corez; Reserve Lisa Beggs with Joker **Champion Bull Cross** James Woods with Buster; Reserve

Mickey Quinn with Hoss **Champion Terrier** Terry Crossen with Teddy: Reserve Scott Connolly with Fonzy **Plummers**

Sam White with Viper; Reserve Sam White with Finn

Champion Strong Dog Ethan Barry with Sully; Stephen



Dog of the year Award went to Janet Duke with Oscar (pictured centre)

McPolin with Rebel Overall Show Champion of Champions

Janet Duke with Oscar; Reserve Lisa Beggs with Corez

It was nice to see the first Bull Cross Championship at this show. There was a big class of Bull Cross in the ring, and what better man to judge this class than Albert Titterington, Director of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland. James Woods was a proud man with his dog Buster winning this prestigious Championship, as was Mickey Quinn with his dog Hoss taking Reserve Champion.

Surprise presentations

Dessie always has surprise presentations up his sleeve on Christmas show day, and this year was no exception. The first accolade on Dessie's list this year was for Dog of the Year and this award went to a well deserved winner, Janet Duke, and her top class Whippet Oscar. Oscar owes Janet nothing, and has won many Champion of Champions down through the years and added many more to his list in 2017.

Next on the list, was Country Sports Personalities of 2017, which was awarded to Tom Barry and myself for our contribution to country sports in Ireland, with photography, write ups, shows, show advertisements, and providing show and Game Fair information on the Hunting Life, Face Book, and Irish Country Sports and Country Life Magazine. Many thanks Dessie for thinking so highly of Tom and myself. And finally, may I take this opportunity to thank the judges on the day: Whippets Sharon Martin Eames; Terriers/Strong Dogs Hannah Heinonen; Lurchers Chontelle Mc Meekin

Children's Handling Class Margaret Mc Stay; Bull Cross Championship Albert Titterington

Your judgements were fair, and carried out meticulously. Thank you for a job well done.

Many thanks to Albert Titterington and the Great Game Fairs of Ireland for their generous sponsorship for this show and thanks especially to Dessie Mackin for putting on another brilliant show despite the fact tragedy hit his family during the year, with the passing of his beloved son Darren.

I hope to see you all in the coming show and racing season.



Country Sports Personalities of 2017 went to Tom Barry & Margaret McStay.







1. Terry Crossen and his Champion Terrier Teddy, Res Champion Scott Connolly with Fonzy.

2. Champion Whippet - Janet Duke With Oscar Res Champion Leeroy McCullough with Tizer.

3. James Wood was the winner of a very strong Bull Breed class.

4. Champion Lurcher - Lisa Beggs with Cores Res Lisa Beggs with Joker, handled by Charlene Rafferty.

5. Children's Handling Class -Chelsea Rafferty with Rosie, Logan Hepburn with Joe and Lewis Johnston.

6. Champion Plummer - Sam White with Viper, Res Champion Sam White with Finn.

7. Champion Puppy - Lisa Hanratty with Dakota, Res Champion Carol Brown with Porti.











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The rod bends with the weight of the skate.

A little while back, I wrote an article about my first experience fishing for Common Skate and in that piece I said that I had caught one estimated to be around 100 pounds in weight. On that trip I also lost two fish to break-offs; I was determined that I would not lose another one.

Like most other responsible anglers, I do not like to lose a fish, not just because it gets away, but because we do not like the idea of the fish being left with a hook in its mouth. I don't know any recreational anglers who use stainless steel hooks so hooks rust out fairly quickly.

Last year the final fish caught by Ken was a monster, or so I thought. I later heard that it weighed about 150 pounds and was hard work to bring in. I honestly thought I would not see its like again. But I was in for a surprise. We caught, by that I mean boated seven skate then, and lost three. With plenty of dolphins and a few whales seen, it had been a great trip, so we decided to go again this year. In preparation for this I loaded up my reel with ninety pound breaking strain braided line as I did not want to lose any fish.

Common skate are the largest of our skate species, indeed it is actually two species, Flapper and blue Skate but for management reasons are classed as common skate. They are listed as endangered, and for many years were not on allowed as specimens in Ireland. They were thought to be extinct in the Irish Sea. Common skate are thought to have made a bit of a comeback in recent years since they were prohibited as a commercial species.

I know of at least two caught and thrown back by the commercial fisheries in the Irish Sea, but they are still protected, and earlier this year, Northern Ireland banned any targeting of them even by recreational anglers. However, they do survive well, as all rays do, if handled correctly.

One tagged female off Oban in Scotland has been caught and released at least eighteen times, probably more by now. It is estimated that each time she is caught it brings in the region of 2,000 pounds into the local economy, with accommodation, food and drink bought by anglers targeting Skate. Worthless if caught and killed by a trawler.

I deferred to my more experienced angling friends in Cork to book the boat at the right stage of the tide, so Ross booked the full moon in July aboard Nick Dent's 'Rooster' out of Baltimore. This year I was joined by my friend Damian and we made the journey down from Dublin the evening before,



Another fine conger.

intending to spend the evening fishing for Bass about an hour from Baltimore.

The new arrival was behind me holding a fine bass on his line

We camped out and headed down the beach all geared up for a lure session at the bass. We had a long walk to the mark at low tide and started fishing full of optimism. Damian soon had a nice fish and I plugged away. A local arrived down beside us and began fishing with worm baits. As the tide turned and I was considering calling it a night, I felt a 'call of nature' and this decided my actions, so I made towards the dunes above the high tide mark. As I turned, the new arrival was behind me holding a fine bass on his line. He asked me if I wanted it, as he was about to release it. I said that I did, so Damian and I now had our limit of one bass each for the day.

We arrived on the pier as Nick brought the boat in to moor it alongside and were quickly ready to head out. The trip to our first drop was accompanied by two harbour porpoises that left as we stopped to feather up some mackerel. Luckily the mackerel obliged so we headed on out further and soon had strings of coalfish joining the mackerel in the bait box. A couple of ling and conger also came aboard to be retained as eating fish.

Damian caught a fine conger which was shaken off the hook beside the boat and soon Nick was dropping the anchor at the skate mark in over two hundred feet of water. It took over a pound of lead weight to keep the baits on the bottom as the tide was not yet slack. In any tide monofilament line provides too much drag to be able to hold the bottom which is why we use braid as it is much thinner for similar strength. We prepared traces of two hundred pound breaking strain mono to attach to the hook, a big size 10/0 for those interested. I did not use crimps as many do, but tied the hook on with a knot like an anchor hitch with a modification.

As the bait was prepared, a group of common dolphins played around the boat. A coalfish and a mackerel was the chosen combination. Both with a slice opening the belly cavity, to release some odour. These were hooked up and the traces lowered to the seabed. This time bites were very slow coming, compared to last year, but we persevered. Damian eventually hooked into a decent fish which had him straining as a bend was



The Author's Skate was over 6 ft long and around 186 pounds.

put in his rod, we were all hoping it would be a decent Skate but were disappointed to see the line go slack as the line broke.

A huge minkie surfaced just behind the boat

I was surprised and pleased to see a number of "by the wind sailors" drift past. I have seen these small relatives of the Portuguese man o' war washed up on beaches many times, but this was a first for me to see them at sea. At one point a huge minkie whale surfaced just behind the boat. I say huge but they are the smallest of the 'baleen whales' at about thirty feet. You never really know what you could see when at sea so its worth keep sharp lookout. This is what I was doing when one of the lads said he thought my rod tip had got a knock.

I picked up the rod and could feel something gently pull a bit of line. I let it pull for a few seconds before tightening up and waiting until I could feel its weight, then I heaved back to set the hook. I was rewarded with a furious tugging on the line. Whatever it was, it was hooked. I heaved it up from the bottom as quickly as I could, which was not very quickly but it kept tugging. I said that I did not think it was a Skate the way it was tugging, more like a conger possibly, but then it just became a dead weight and I was not really sure what it might be.

One thing for sure it was heavy and that I was getting a real workout. The rod was bent so much that as I reeled in some line I could see that the line was pressing against the top of the rod handle. I had the drag as tight as I dared and heaved the rod tip up and tried to gain a bit of line each time I dropped the rod down to pull up again. My hands and arms were getting stiff so I sat down at the stern of the boat and could work the rod without using my back.

I had checked my watch soon after the fight started out of curiosity, but did not get a chance to look again as suddenly the rod heaved over and the fish simply swam away back to the bottom. I just could not stop it. The line was as tight as a banjo string and I prepared for a waiting game. Just hanging on to the rod and taking a few yards back when I could.

I was holding the rod with my left hand and my right was on the reel handle ready to take a turn when I could. With the cup beside me I was grateful to be able to snatch a quick drink with my right hand when I could. This fish was wearing me out. Then it seemed to change its mind and allowed me to gain a few yards, maybe this was just a bluff as it dived again to the bottom and I had to start the whole 'heave ho' again.

Over an hour to get the fish to the boat

As I gained some line, the rod butt slid out of the butt holder which was pressed into my groin. Through the pain I kept the pressure on. Eventually the fish came to the surface about fifty yards behind the boat and I could confirm that it really was a Skate. It took another few very anxious minutes before it was within gaffing distance, Ross and Nick gaffed it in the wings and between them heaved it over the side of the boat. I glanced at my watch. It had taken me just over an hour to get the fish to the boat. With the hook out we now manoeuvred the fish to the best place on the boat to measure her (it was a female). Even here her wings were too wide to reach out together, so one was measured to the centreline.

She was put on a measuring mat and was over two meters ten long. Time to get a photo or two. A study is being done in Queens University looking at the possibility of using photo ID techniques to study Skate, She was also tagged with a fisheries ID tag to record her movements and then we could get her back into the sea. Easier said than done, it took the combined efforts of four of us to heave her over the side and watch her swim away. Besides her weight, there are not many places to get a grip on a skate, they are slippery with a tail covered in sharp spines.

Nick later checked his length to

weight charts and worked out that she weighed about 186 pounds, easily the heaviest fish I have ever caught. Ross thought she might be more because she was quite thick in the body. I really did not care; it was a privilege to have caught her and to see her swim off, soon to be none the worse for the experience.

I had to keep flexing my hands all the way home as I drove as both arms were cramping up. I think in all fairness the fish won. My arms were sore for a few days and I had a painful, if interesting bruise in my groin area. But what a great experience. My gear and knots had stood up to the test. Before we finished up my rod got another big pull. I grabbed it but no more movement, a group of dolphins started playing around the boat. Nick thought that one must have hit the line, something he had never seen before.

We came back again 'loaded for bear' as they say, with strong lines, harnesses and all better prepared later in the year as Damian and Ross were determined to catch a big one, but this time the wind had veered to the East and we could not even get a single Skate to bite. But that's fishing, we still had a great day out with good company and marvellous sights to see. And we will be back again.



Ken's Skate was hard work to get in the boat.

Country Chat

A 'handy' operation and a missed shot don't dampen Billy's delight with pointers on a Scottish hill, while back home and away from snow it's all ducks and drakes.

I scribbled this article with my left hand heavy in bandage, having gone through an operation at Musgrave Park hospital a few days earlier, although it wasn't as dramatic as, perhaps it appeared at first. Luckily, I was in and out again in one day, although I did need someone there at the end of the day to drive me home. A couple of years ago I went to my local surgery for a health check and, when I was there, I used the opportunity to enquire about small lumps on the palms and fingers of both hands. It turned out to be Dupuytrens contracture and to my surprise I was told that it is a hereditary thing and eventually (to my horror) I would lose



Billy with Roxy on the Flichity Estate, Scotland.

the use of three fingers. They would turn inwards and end up flat on the palm of both hands becoming so useless that not only would they rub the skin away, where they lay flat on the palm of my hand, but it would be impossible to wash underneath the offending fingers in turn.

They now perform what is known as a regional anaesthesia, where they inject a nerve in your arm and this makes the arm numb and immobile, allowing the surgery to proceed without needing general anaesthesia. In less than thirty minutes or so, I was convinced my left arm didn't belong to me. The two young female surgeons chatted away to each other whilst they operated on the ring finger of my left hand. I in turn waffled to the nurse beside me, talking about her cocker spaniel which I learned was called Dudley, and dogs in general.

After my arm had thawed out the next day, I was surprised how little I could do about the home. Granted the pain killers had me drowsy all the time; even simple chores like opening the coffee jar didn't come easy, but it did make me spare a thought for those sitting outside at the hospital entrance when I first arrived. They were laughing and joking, all of them had missing limbs and had probably formed a bond of friendship over a period of hospital visits.

On the day of the operation I went to bed at eight thirty that evening and didn't wake up until eleven the next morning, which in itself was a shock to the system if ever there was one. So, if this article is full of more flaws than usual and just doesn't seem to be, well, quite me, it's only because I was really not quite myself at the time!

During the first week of the grouse season back in August, I was working

Heidi and Sally the two German pointers on a moor on the Dell estate in Scotland. I was with a father, his two daughters and another young man, who had never shot a grouse before.

We had been out for a hour or so and what opportunities the dogs had provided, holding point until two 'guns' were selected and got up close to the dogs to take the shot. These were either missed or the birds ran on and flushed out of range, which was very frustrating for the inexperienced young guns.

Bith dogs were on a solid point

On one occasion, we had to climb a steep hill, which probably seemed like a mountain to them. We needed to reach a height which would put us level with the rest of the party in order to meet up with them later for lunch. Being fairly fit and well able for the task, I shot on up the steep hill in front of them and when I got to the top I could see that Heidi and Sally were solid on point.

From here, I could also see that the four guns were well down below and that it would take them a while to get up the hill. When they did get up beside me I told them to take a breather, compose themselves and when they were ready, select which of them would be going forward to the two dogs who were still on point, both of them had been rooted to the spot for over thirty minutes, transfixed like two statues to the scent of the grouse concealed somewhere in the heather.

One of the young ladies went forward and the young man, who had yet to shoot a grouse. I beckoned the two guns to go forward and, almost at the same time, clicked my tongue for the two dogs to flush.

Two grouse shot up out of the heather, to my experienced eyes they were as black as coal and an easy right and left. Four shots followed in their wake and yet not a feather of either bird was touched. But that in no way diminished the magic of shooting



Pickers-up setting off in the snow. grouse over pointers and, in fairness to the two young guns, I have seen more experienced guns miss similar opportunities.

A few days earlier, I had been working the two Germans on the opening day of the grouse season for the owner of the Dell estate, Mr Jermey Finnis. We were high up on the side of yet another steep hill and far down below us, close to the vehicle track, a twelve year old setter dog was on point. The English setter belonged to a sexagenarian lady who was out with us that day.

"If I have to go all the way down there Billy, I am not coming back up again" said Mr Finnis, and understandably so.

"Well, there is always that" I replied, "besides, they may well flush long before you get down there anyway. Or, if you wish, you can walk no more than fifteen feet to your right, because Heidi is on point." Mr Finnis actually got a left and right out of the covey which Heidi was holding on point.

I had loads of fun in the opening week of the grouse season. I picked up on one driven grouse shoot with the two cockers and the next day took up a flanking role, again with Pippa and Polly in attendance. "I always thought that flanking on a driven grouse shoot was a specialised role" I remarked innocently to a seasoned picker-up. "Well obviously not Billy" he said with a smile.

New entrants

Back home and only a few feet from the back door, I am pleased to say that I



Bob Kass from Farr, Inverness with Mack. (photo by Bob Kass)

have five new entrants this year to supplement the ever diminishing number of domestic fowl about the garden. Breeding and capitalising on what stock I have - short of buying in to which I detest - has always been a hit and miss affair in the past, more miss than hit.

I can only remember once in twentysomething years being able to pass on surplus fowl as a result of a good breeding season. This year my Sussex rooster - my only rooster - had to be put down; it had been moping about the yard all the time, hunched up and looking sorry for itself. I discovered during a visit to an animal feed store that, added to the many ailments hens are prone to, they can also develop what is known as 'scaley leg' and it is treatable. Unfortunately for my rooster with 'scaley leg' I only discovered that, after I dispatched it. But I console myself that there was something else more serious with it, and it was the

kindest option under the circumstances to put it down.

Just before his demise however, a small black hen went broody and despite several moves, shifting herself and her eggs all over the place, she still managed to rear three small chicks, one of which as luck would have it, and the long legs suggested, turned out to be a rooster.

At the start of last year, the only drake which I had disappeared, be it to foxy or whatever, but it left six ducks laying eggs for breakfast, lunch and tea. So, off I went for six fertile duck eggs. They were put under a Sussex hen, which for the past four weeks previously had been sitting on golf balls. The poor creature had to do it all over again for another four weeks, and she managed to rear two young ducks, one of which is black and would appear to be a drake.

I hope to get back to Scotland to work the dogs, picking up and on the

moor. I am also hoping that LB and myself get out more next season with dogs and gun, whether it be commercial on a small scale, or merely the pair of us enjoying a wee ramble about hedge and marsh.

In the early part of last year, I exchanged guns with a friend, my Berretta over and under 20bore, for his AYA side by side 12bore. My son is more familar with two triggers than I am as I was weaned on a single trigger and I am at my happiest fielding my other Berretta, a single trigger 20bore. The AYA is as old, if not older, than me and is in immaculate condition. My son has yet to shoot anything with it, but he did have the opportunity at a wily old cock pheasant which decided to dodge LB and myself and wisely as it turned out, take it's chances over the head of the young lad with his AYA. although I quipped to LB later that it may have been just as safe if it had flown straight over his head!

Hunting Roundup



The Newry Hunt at Cranky, Co Armagh.

Around the meets The North Down Foxhounds

The North Down Foxhounds' opening meet, at Carrickmannon, had to be delayed for a week, due to heavy rainfall and residual water, so there was even keener determination, than normal, to enjoy the occasion.

Huntsman Barry Jones had on a 12¹/₂ couple mixed pack with his brother Philip and Robert Campbell as whippers-in while Lesley Webb MFH had charge of a thirty strong mounted field.

The first draw, off Bog Road, saw a fox calmly sit down in front of the huntsman and hounds were unable to hunt it! A move to Dessie Jordan's saw every covert blank so when Sammy Hanna's land yielded a fox there was universal satisfaction! Hounds hunted strongly, in patchy scenting conditions, with a good cry and pushed their fox right around the farm.

Our pilot moved into Mrs Walsh's and, after a fast circular hunt, hounds lost him so Barry Jones moved on to Sammy Hazlett's. Here hounds found another fox which took them into Magoran's and thence into Robert Orr's in still patchy scenting conditions. After another fast hunt this fox went to ground, in a bank.

Barry Jones then blew for home in late afternoon. He had just one couple of dog-hounds from his new entry out, one by Portman Bonner 12 and one by Fitzwilliam Stilton 12. They have both entered well in autumn hunting and certainly performed well here.

The East Down Foxhounds

The East Down Foxhounds' opening meet, the following Saturday, was at Ballynoe, outside Downpatrick.

Huntsman Declan Feeney had on an 18¹/₂ couple mixed pack with Barry Jones helping out, on the day, as whipper-in, in the absence of Brian Tonner. A twenty strong mounted field under field master Pat Turley included Lesley Webb MFH, like Barry Jones visiting from the North Downs.

One unpleasant feature of the day, which was present from start to finish, was the presence of some twenty masked, black-clad hunt saboteurs. They made everyone appreciate the accompaniment of a number of car followers, who also remained for the day. The saboteurs had a number of sprays which they used when close to hounds but, fortunately, with no ill effects. Declan Feeney first drew the Willows, off Old Course Road from where a fox went afoot, crossed the road, in front of your correspondent, then crossed The Gallops before going to ground in a bank where hounds, despite being very quickly on the scene could make nothing of it.

A move to Marlborough House covert proved blank so matters moved to P\at Turley's where hounds drew the bog near the top end of Downpatrick Race Course and Pauley's Bog, from where a fox went afoot and ran to Ballydugan Road where hounds were stopped due to cattle. Thompson's Bog, at the livestock sales yard on Bonecastle Road, proved blank as did Marshallstown.

At Mageean's, hounds dislodged one very big customer from the sugar beet but here the antis used their sprays and Declan Feeney blew for home to end this poor scenting day.

The Iveagh Foxhounds

At Katesbridge, Co Down, the Iveagh Foxhounds enjoyed a bright, cool day which also had some sunshine.

A mounted field of some thirty riders included all three joint masters Bob Wilson, Alexander Mills and the newly



Tynan Armagh huntsman Keith McCall at Milford, Co Armagh.

appointed Sarah Dawson, the local trainer. Huntsman Philip Watts, on a black gelding which would not have looked out of place on Horse Guards Parade, is in his first season here and had on a 14¹/₂ couple mixed pack with Alan Watson and Patrick Grinter assisting him. Philip's son Sean, who normally whips in to him is still 'off games' after a crashing fall at the very start of the season but he is recovering, albeit slowly.

He first drew John Savage's land, off Manse Road, before moving to Ardbrin Road. After a series of draws right across Ardbrin and Ballysheil townlands a fox went afoot at Bluehill, crossing the road in front of your correspondent.

This fox ran up the hill on the left hand side of the road just as a brace went afoot on our right hand side to run, not quite nose to tail, up that hill towards Ardbrin Road despite very close pursuit of the first customer by 2½ couple of hounds. At Monteith Road, hounds turned hard behind their fox but could make nothing more of it. Both foxes are believed to have gone to ground in the same earth off Monteith Road.

The old Katesbridge railway line has often proved fruitful but there was no

sign of anyone else at home so, at this early stage of the season, with several horses showing signs of approaching their limits Philip Watts blew for home in late afternoon to end a good hound day.

The Newry Hunt

The first Saturday in December saw a continuation of the cool, dry, bright weather as the Newry Hunt met at Cranky Corner, between Bessbrook and Markethill, Co Armagh.

Huntsman Mark McIlroy had on a 13 couple mixed pack, composed of Harriers, small Foxhounds and, I was intrigued to see, one Kerry Beagle and one Dumfriesshire doghound , albeit a small one. He was assisted by Ian Bryson and James Hammond while field master Brian Johnston had charge of a sixteen strong mounted field.

The first draw, on the land of former field master Teddy Matthews who was following by car, saw one fox go afoot from Lutton's Bog. Hounds pushed their pilot hard and in good voice as far as Keadybeg where he went to ground and was given best.

A series of draws at Keith Agnew's and Bolton Bog kept matters moving as hounds continued across Finch's, before some music burst forth but we car followers could not see anything.

Hounds drew Agnew's at Lisnalee, off the main Markethill to Bessbrook Road and, as they moved on to Wallace's Willows their second fox appeared only to double back in front of us. He ran through Revel's and, on getting to the radio mast at Tullyhappy, hounds lost him in deteriorating scenting conditions. Mark McIlroy then blew for home in late afternoon before light started to fade.

The Tynan and Armagh Hunt

The Tynan and Armagh Hunt, now a registered Foxhound pack, had their pre Christmas meet at the county Armagh home of senior master Brian Dougan.

A twenty-five strong mounted field included all three joint masters Brian Dougan, Wilson Faloon and Roy McCall, while the huntsman Keith McCall had on a 12 couple mixed pack with Philip Singleton whipping-in and Andy Philips acting as field master.

The going was heavy with a great amount of water lying in places and there seemed to be very little scent throughout the day. As if to emphasise these points the first draw, behind Brian Dougan's house, proved blank while the nearby Dunwoody's Bog was completely flooded. However, in the willows above the bog hounds put one customer afoot and a short, sharp hunt ensued before this fox went to ground in Dunwoody's.

Keith McCall then drew right around Porridge House but it was blank so putting their second fox afoot, at the Old Mill, came as a relief. This presaged another short, sharp hunt as far as Derryhaw Road where this fox went to ground, under the road and, like the first fox was given best.

The huntsman then blew for home, in late afternoon, in now nonexistent scenting conditions.

The County Down Hounds

The County Down Hounds' Boxing Day meet was held, as usual, at Ballynahinch. Huntsman Ian Donoghue had on a 12¹/₂ couple mixed pack with James Black and James Johnston whipping-in while a seventy-five strong mounted field, under joint masters Britt Megahey and Ross McCandless, included Ross's father William, himself a former master here.

After parading through the town centre, matters moved to the Downpatrick Road area and the field was quickly given something to do to keep up with Ian Donoghue's flying charges.

It did not appear to be a good scenting day as matters progressed to Raleagh and Terry Steele's farm. From here they moved, at speed, into Creevyargon and then back towards the meet where home was blown to end a blank, but fast paced day.

The North Down Foxhounds

The North Down Foxhounds had



Mid Antrim huntsman Tom Haddock with the hounds at Moneymore.their New Year's Day meet at the Oldmaintained at Smith McCannInn, Crawfordsburn, where the hosts,across Johnston's. As houndsthe Rice Family, staged their usualworking hard for their huntsmwelcome and highly professionalfield, now reduced to some eihospitality.riders, were finding it very hard

Some one-hundred horses and ponies were "out" to welcome huntsman Barry Jones, his 12¹/₂ couple mixed pack and whippers-in Philip Jones, Robert Campbell and Adam Finnegan. Lesley Webb handled this large field with her usual charm and elan and everyone respected the land they were on.

There was an anti-hunt protest from the Green Party and from the Hunt Saboteurs Association, but they were greatly outnumbered by supporters, who greeted the North Downs with loud and sustained applause as they left the main street.

The recent persistent, heavy rain had left the going very cloying, which was underlined at David Jackson's, maintained at Smith McCann's and right across Johnston's. As hounds moved, working hard for their huntsman the field, now reduced to some eighty riders, were finding it very hard to stay with them and many shoes were being cast. At least the farriers would be happy!

Matters moved through Jim McCann's and on as far as Caroline de Montmorency's and then into Allan and Ian McFarland's. Here, Barry Jones blew for home on this blank day which was not only wet but also, at times, bitingly cold.

We were again able to put the Rice family's hospitality to the test and it was not found wanting!

The Mid Antrim Hunt

The Mid Antrim Hunt meet outside Moneymore, Co Londonderry, had a very dark, wet and miserable day to test them with pools of water lying extensively across the whole area. Another restriction on the country available on the day was the filming, nearby, of the television programme 'Game of Thrones.'

Huntsman Tom Haddock, in his third season here, had on a 16¹/₂ couple mainly of bitches but with a couple of dog-hounds sired by Beaufort and Heythrop stallion hounds. Jamie Boyd was whipping-in while a dozen hardy souls in the mounted field included joint masters Drendan Doherty and James Gillespie as well as ex master Gordon Cunningham, all under field master George Devlin.

The first draw, at John Scullion's, saw a brace afoot with hounds settling on one fox which they pushed hard and musically as far as Ivor and Glenda McNiece's. I don't know how they do it in this remote area but they run a thriving tack business. However, hounds lost their fox here in very poor scenting conditions.

Tom Haddock then drew Richmond's which was blank, but hounds then put their third fox afoot, in Mulholland's. Hounds continued in good voice and pushed this fox as far as Millar's Transport, only to also lose him in poor scenting conditions.

Ronnie Tompkins' also proved blank, but a move to Billy Ross's saw another fox afoot to give a good hunt all the way to Tannaghmore Road, where he was lost and Tom Haddock blew for home.



East Down huntsman Declan Feeny drawing covert at Ballynoe, Nr Downpatrick.

Photographs by kind permission of: Mark McCall Photography - markjsmccall.com

CHILDREN'S ANNUAL CHARITY EVENT RAISES £1500

Tynan and Armagh Foxhounds held their Annual Charity Event, the New Year's Day Children's Meet in Richhill. The event saw a great turn out of horses and ponies with over 80 participants.



Stewards and Chaperones carried out a fine job ensuring all were safely returned to their parents.

Tynan and Armagh Foxhounds would like to thank the landowners by whose kind permission this meet was possible as well as Richhill Presbyterian Church for allowing use of their car park.

Many thanks must also go to all our brave participants. The event generated $\pounds 1500.00$ for the NI Air Ambulance.

If you want to help support Air Ambulance NI please visit http://www.airambulanceni.org/fundrais ing/

The cheque was presented the following weekend at the host's meet, the Phillips' family home, where members and visitors were welcomed with mulled wine to generate much needed heat into the riders as the day was beautiful but very cold.

Huntsman Keith McCall had on twelve and a half couple ably assisted by the Whipper-In Philip Singleton. The Joint Masters, Brian Dougan, Wilson Faloon and Roy McCall along with Field Master Andrew Phillips had charge of a field of 25.

The first draw was at W. Smith's land, after a short sharp hunt went to ground.

The second draw was at I. Stevenson's planting, where a fox was raised which ran over G. Hutchinson's meadow, continued onto L. Jenkinson's land. Hounds hunted well through marsh ground, he was put to ground half Andrew Phillips Field Master & family members - event organisers.

a mile after.

Another fox was raised in R. Black's planting, which travelled over A. Nicholl's railway, continued onto H. Moffatt's, E. Pillow's and W. Matchett's lands where he was lost. Keith McCall then blew for home around 4.00pm and members retired once more to enjoy the heat from the fire and great hospitality supplied by the ladies of the hunt.



Presenting the cheque



Ellie Rose Leigh Livingstone

Alex Best



Alex Phillips



Bethany Smith



Amber Lucas

Darcey Robinson



The Lead Rein Group





John Anthony Leigh Livingstone



Huntsman & Hounds



(Above) Rodney and Katie Robinson

(Right) Returning home



Jasmine Wright



Hunt Master - Brian Dougan



Happiness Is... Winter Hunting On Foot

The Rockview Foot Harriers in North Kilkenny.

At the time of writing (late January) I have been out several times with a number of footpacks during the winter season hunting both fox and hare, principally in Kilkenny and Tipperary. In this article I recount the experiences of a few of those days. Before I do so, a few thoughts on this wonderful sport that some of us are so fortunate to be able to pursue.

Some of us hunt for the same reason that we might enjoy walking in the hills or sailing on the sea. We want to get away from it all, for a few hours at least, get away from the business of the world with its debts and problems. Sometimes hunting is such a tonic for us that its effect is just as good as meditation (which is quite fashionable these days). For a few hours we have forgotten our troubles and have been happy. It can be difficult though to let go of your anxieties when hunting in the field. Your worries or worldly preoccupations can still remain with you, divorcing you from the pleasure of what is happening at the moment.

At such times I think it's best to remind oneself of certain wise statements by great writers. For example, the American writer Thoreau said, "What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?" In other words, when I am hunting it's incumbent on me to shake off my concerns, enjoy myself and enter into the spirit of the activity. My season this year began on Saturday November 4th and I am glad to report that I left the business of the world firmly behind me and had a great time! I joined the Rockview Foot Harriers in some lovely hilly countryside between Kilkenny city and the small town of Ballyragget. Our hunt started at 9am in a farmyard where the owners came out and chatted amiably with us.

We set off and walked for quarter of an hour to our first covert, which was a lovely looking thing and which the hunt followers called "The Mound". This was a compact, gorse-covered hillock and it looked picturesque in the chill, bright light of early morning. Huntsman Rock Dicker urged his 12 couple of foxhounds into the covert. Soon the hounds picked up some scent.

The pack latched onto three or four different foxes

The fox left the covert almost immediately and raced across several fields towards a huge sitka spruce plantation. The enthusiastic, keen hounds followed shortly, sweet hound music sounding through rolling fields and woods. We spent an hour in the sitka plantation during which time the pack latched onto three or four different foxes. After an hour of this Rory had had enough and blew the hounds away to the next covert which was a magnificent, steep, narrow, wooded valley stretching for about a mile through low hill country. We spent a couple of hours at this attractive place and we had a grandstand view from the top of the valley as the hounds followed the same circuit again and again.

Atom -

A couple of years ago we had a great hunt in exactly the same spot which involved negotiating the steep bramblecovered slopes of the valley and then ascending steeply up to the top of a big hill on the other side. By the time I reached the top of the hill my brow was "exceeding damp" and I was "blowing hard". It was a fantastic hour of hunting. On this occasion however the fox had no intention of leaving the valley but



The hounds scraped frantically at the entrance to the den.

kept resolutely to it. At one o'clock the weather forecast proved accurate. The sun and blue sky disappeared, a dark cloud floated overhead and chill rain fell upon us. The weather had gone from pleasant to unpleasurable. Thankfully I was wearing a heavy tweed shooting jacket. I fastened its neck cover for further protection.

We walked up and down the edge of the high valley for the next hour. The hounds never stopped chasing and the fox never left the valley. At two o'clock, after five hours hunting, Rory decided to blow for home. It had been an excellent start to the season.

The following weekend I joined the Ballydine Beagles near Cashel. This pack once attracted fields of 20 to 30 people but is now down to just a handful of people, yet another sign of the decline in Beagling's popularity in Ireland. It really baffles me as to why this should be so as it is such a fantastic day out. However, fashions do change and perhaps the tide will turn for this excellent sport. The huntsman of the Ballydines is Cormac Browne. Cormac is a friendly huntsman who has great enthusiasm for beagling. This enthusiasm is obvious when out hunting with him.

We met at a pub called Lacey's at a crossroads at 10 on a Sunday morning in the townland of Ballydine, several miles from Cashel. Cormac had brought 12 couple with him and we unloaded the pack at Ballymore Bog nearby, which is a mixture of forestry and open bog. The open bog is an attractive place, a wide area of brown heather surrounded by a ring of mixed forestry.

Soon the beagles were speaking and there was barely a pause in their music for the next hour. We left the forestry track and walked through the rough country, because this is always more interesting than staying on the trail, and jogged whenever we could through the trees. It had been raining heavily for two days beforehand and the land was very wet. Great pools of sphagnum moss looked like quagmires which would swallow you whole and leave no trace of you bar a hat floating on the surface. We regularly sank up to our knees in the wet holes. Sometimes the land became more solid and then we could speed up. The weather was good cool, blue skies and sunny - and it was great to be out.

Then hounds began speaking again

After an hour of decent hound music things went quiet. The hare had managed to slip his pursuers. Sometimes when this happens the hare can be sitting nearby and when the huntsman casts the hounds about the quarry is found once again and the pursuit resumes. Alas, it was not to be on this occasion. For the next hour things were quiet. Then hounds began speaking again but unfortunately it wasn't a hare but a couple of deer. Don and Dave headed off the pack and stopped them from pursuing this unwanted quarry. At two o'clock, after four hours out, Cormac blew for home.

A mixture of work commitments and bad weather lost a few weeks of hunting

for me during November and December and it was mid December before I got out again. The day began badly because I had a potentially very nasty fall on the icy road outside my house. The weather had been very cold the previous couple of weeks with the thermometer dropping to minus 8 on December 10.

On December 16, when I was setting out for Kilkenny at 7.30am, it had been minus three the night before and the road outside my house was like glass. I landed heavily on my knees and hands. The pain cut like a knife and my knees and hands were grazed and bleeding. I sat into my car, cursing (I usually curse when I am in pain). It took a few minutes to muster my resources and then I set off, driving slowly.

An hour later as I was coming into Kilkenny city the roads were still potentially dodgy and traffic was going slow. The guards were setting up a diversion at a roundabout. There had been an accident shortly beforehand. I saw the car being towed away. Its front section was badly stoved in. It looked a write-off and a single vehicle collision. Perhaps the driver had been going too fast for the conditions?



A compact, gorse-covered hillock stood before us.

I met 11 foot-followers of the Rockview hunt at a pleasant pub called Paddy's Country Pub on the old Dublin road from Kilkenny and we boxed on a few miles to the place of our day's hunt in the townland of Coolgreaney. This is hilly, picturesque country in North Kilkenny, about halfway between the



The third covert was a long wooded valley with a green strip running down its middle and the trees running up the slopes and over the hill tops.



After four hours out, Cormac blew for home.

towns of Castlecomer and Gowran, and usually a decent place for hunters. There were loads of foxes here, which is the story throughout much of Ireland. The fox population is generally doing well. The fact there were several foxes in the area meant our pack split, which is not ideal, but they hardly stopped speaking from 10am to 4pm. The scent was outstanding.

We spent the whole day in one long valley which was very soft and heavy going along its bottom, through which a stream meandered. The combination of this taxing terrain and the slopes of the valley resulted in a day of plenty of exercise and much calorie burning.

About two hours into the day most of the pack was in pursuit of a fox along the bottom of the valley. They had been in pursuit of this particular fox for perhaps half-an-hour. We followed as quickly as the difficult terrain would allow, which was pitted with holes, pools of water and covered with swathes of briars. Briars always make the going tough. They seem to be nature made animate, to possess a conscious will whose purpose is to slow you down.

Tired limbs told us that it had been a physically taxing day

As we crossed the stream for the umpteenth we came close to the action, in time to see the lead hounds catch up with the fox. As always, the end of the chase was over in the blink of an eye. We waited for the 12 couple to do their thing and then we moved on. It wasn't long before music was sweeping through the landscape once again. The pack chased two more foxes during the rest of the day but didn't catch them. As the huntsman blew for home our tired limbs told us that it had been a physically taxing day. As I drove home the weather forecast told me it was going to be milder over the coming days, which was good news as it would mean less treacherous driving conditions and more hunting.

My last hunting day of 2017 was an absolute cracker. I met Rory and 20 members of the Rockviews at a quarry in remote, rural North Kilkenny called Ballyfoyle. We set of at 10am and put the 15 couple into the gorse bushes surrounding the limestone quarry. Almost immediately they began speaking in a really excited, enthusiastic manner. They ran for a couple of miles across the undulating fields until Rénard ran for cover in a bolthole beneath a limestone outcrop. The hounds scraped frantically at the entrance to the den with the lead hound disappearing completely into the hole. We pulled him out and blew the hounds away to the next covert.

It had been extremely wet for the previous week and it was very hard to jog across the fields. Most of the time a walk was all one could manage. Sometimes the fields had been heavily pitted by cattle which made the going slower. There was a blessed lack of ploughed fields except for one large field which was energy sapping. The mud caked to the boots walking across this field making one's feet heavier.

We put the hounds into a large deciduous wood and the music started immediately. We followed, entering the wood. Parts of this were extremely muddy and I sometimes sank up to my knees. After half an hour running around here Rénard left the wood and ran across the fields. The hounds were almost on him but he made the safety of his den a couple of miles away. We blew away again and walk towards the third and final covert. We had been hunting for four hours and were feeling a little tired.

The third covert was a long wooded valley with a green strip running down its middle and the trees running up the slopes and over the hill tops. We stood at an excellent vantage point high above the valley and soon were watching a great chase which went all over the place for a long period of time, the hounds often very close behind. After a half-hour the fox began to tire. We could see the lead hounds catch up with him as he traversed the green swathe on the valley bottom. And then they were upon him. It was over in a split second.

By this stage it was dusk and we were all tired after a long, fantastic day. We were glad when Rory blew the long, lovely call for going home.

As we walked back in the hastening dusk, dogs and humans silhouetted against the darkening sky, after a wonderful day's hunting in beautiful countryside, it felt a special moment, a contented moment. For some reason I was reminded of the lovely words written by Thoreau in his essay "Walking": "So we saunter toward the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bankside in autumn."

Historic Normandy's Port en Bessin

Port en Bessin, a little fishing port situated west of Arromanches on Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula, is frequently overlooked by visitors touring the nearby 1944 invasion beaches. It doesn't feature in too many brochures either, despite having been a critically important site where, following two days of hard fighting to capture the town, PLUTO was brought ashore (Pipe Line Under The Ocean). Sunk beneath the English Channel, vital fuel required to run the Allies' mechanised war-machine was pumped from southern England directly to France via this pipeline.

It's likely that many readers will have unknowingly seen Port en Bessin on the silver screen as it was a film location used in the movie The Longest Day for the scene portraying a French Commando landing at Ouistreham in 1944. Film buffs may well remember the action where French Commander Keiffer and his troops were assaulting the Casino at Ouistreham and not doing too well until Keiffer, under fire, crossed a narrow bridge over a dock seeking armoured assistance. He ran through drab narrow streets until he located a Sherman which solved the problem of the German heavy cannon. The dock and narrow streets of Port en Bessin are still there today and that's where the similarity ends.

The houses are brightly painted, the dock has a revolving bridge that swings open to allow the numerous local fishing vessels proceed through the main harbour and on out into the Channel. Top class restaurants and interesting shops feature along the quay. On seeing Ouistreham for the first time many years ago I recall thinking that it didn't look anything like the area portrayed in the movie, later everything fell into place when we drove into Port en Bessin.

I have visited there on five occasions, always staying in the 3-star hotel located along the waterfront – a very comfortable and well-run establishment and an ideal base from which to tour the Normandy Beaches. The cathedral town of Bayeux is nearby, with Caen only a 30 minute drive away. Going to the local restaurants for dinner each evening is an interesting experience. Depending on the tides, diners may have to wait at the open bridge while fishing boats exit or enter the narrow waterway. It all adds to the enjoyment of the evening and as for the restaurants, well, take your pick – all are top class.

Literally down the road is Longues-Sur-Mere, where a battery of 4 German 152mm coastal guns in casemates are still in situ, barrels still facing seawards. The casemates, built by slave labour in 1944, were positioned to cover all nearby beaches and consequently received appropriate Allied attention on D Day.

Forward and directly overlooking the sea is a reinforced observation post that was linked by underground tunnels and telephone lines to the guns. This structure also featured in the Longest Day, portrayed as overlooking Utah beach where German Major Werner Pluskat first observed the incoming invasion fleet on June 6th. Pluskat managed to survive the war although his dog Harras disappeared that same morning. The remains of the artificial



Port en Bessin.



The swing bridge opening.



The original Pegasus Bridge.

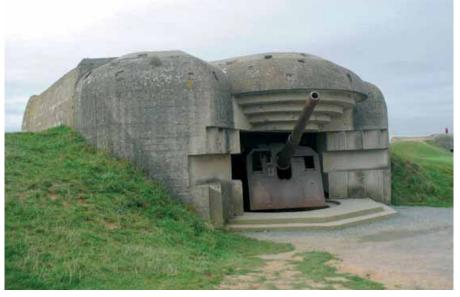
Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches (a short drive away) are clearly visible from the Longues headland. From there it's possible to drive the length of the British landing beaches all the way to Pegasus Bridge at the Eastern end of the invasion area.

The original bridge is now situated in the grounds of a really comprehensive museum alongside the Orne canal at Benouville - well worth seeing. An old friend, the late Josh Honan, landed at Berniers sur Mere (Juno Beach) early on June 6 along with other Engineers whose function was to dismantle mines attached to the strategically placed tetrahedrons along the beach. Quite a hazardous job which he survived! Josh is recorded in Dr. Stephen Ambrose's book "D Day - The Climactic Battle of WW2" as later strolling into the local Barber's Shop soaking wet, to receive a glass of Calvados and a free shave. That establishment is still in existence.

On my most recent visit - last October - the plan was to explore a rural area a few miles outside Ste. Mere Eglise, the most westerly point of the invasion area. The town featured prominently in "The Longest Day" and is specifically remembered for the plight of paratrooper John Steele whose parachute became tangled high on the church, leaving him hanging precariously until rescued by a German soldier.

An appropriately kitted-out tailor's dummy dangling permanently from (almost) the same spot is of immense interest to world-wide visitors. Despite the film's portrayal and numerous other reports, a machine gun was not mounted in the church tower. Rudolph May the German soldier who cut Steele's parachute cords left written testament to this effect before he died in 1985. He also stressed that he ordered his subordinates not to fire from their vantage point for fear of the massive counter-fire this would attract. May and his group managed to escape and make their way to Carentan. Ste Mere Eglise also contains a fine museum and the usual souvenir and militaria shops.

Tucked away at the side of the square



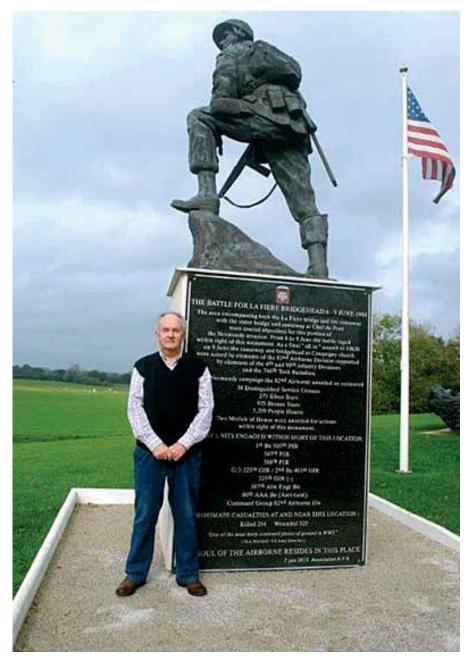
One of the German guns at Lounges sur Mere.

is a small street named "Rue Robert Murphy" commemorating a 19-year old from Boston who had also parachuted into that area on D Day. Murphy became well-known for his subsequent anniversary jumps into the town and specifically one from a C47 aircraft that was actually used in 1944 and now on display in the museum. Beyond that, little was known on this side of the Atlantic about his experiences and the critical events that took place there- that is until his book "Ste Mere Eglise – No Better Place to Die" was published in 2009, the year following his death. This book featured on my bookshelf for several years before I got around to reading it.

Preventing German tanks accessing

the landing beaches was always crucial to the success of the invasion – best known probably being the capture and defence of the easterly Pegasus Bridge area. Less well known is the struggle at the west end. The 82nd Airborne in which Murphy served was tasked with preventing armoured access from the west, by seizing two bridges over the Merderet River roughly four kilometres west of the town in a quiet valley where nothing much ever happened.

The first crossing at Pont du Chef was successfully taken early on June 6th but the second one – a little bridge along a narrow country road at La Fiere was fought over for almost four days. Inexplicably, this action which cost several hundred lives plus countless



casualties seems to have slipped through the cracks of WW2 history for several years, despite the bridge having been of such importance that Generals Matthew Ridgeway and Jim Gavin were both at the scene to ensure a successful outcome.

A local farmhouse, Le Manoir, situated only 50 metres from La Fiere bridge became the focal point of the action and was demolished several times over, having been initially occupied by German troops, as was a little church at Cauquigny, a short distance up the road. Interestingly the tanks used by the Germans were captured French Renaults re-sprayed, upgraded and carrying Wehrmacht insignia. One can but wonder if Tiger tanks with their superior armour and larger calibre guns been available might the outcome have been different? It was the proud boast of the 82nd that the only Germans who crossed that bridge were prisoners.

Due to efforts by the late Robert Murphy and other veterans, the memory of those who fought there was finally highlighted and commemorated in the late 1990's. Today opposite Le Manoir in a suitably converted area the statue of a soldier, "The Iron Mike", overlooks La Fiere Bridge and the battlefield. Further memorials have been erected at Cauquingy and the surrounding area.

A sign along the road marks a hole in the ground – the foxhole from which Jim Gavin fought. Le Manoir is now sheltered by tall trees and visitors are requested to respect the current owner's privacy. Monsieur Louis leroux was reputed to have stashed away a collection of weaponry from those far off days when he and his wife and children found themselves in the middle of a battle. Its whereabouts today is a bit of a mystery. For anyone who plans to spend a few days touring the 1944 invasion area from Ste Mere Eglise right through to Pegasus Bridge, Port en Bessin is the ideal central location.

The author at La Fiere bridge Memorial – The Iron Mike.

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Ireland's woodcock in safe hands

Ireland's native woodcock have a long history steeped in culture. To the general public, they are seen as a charismatic part of our natural heritage, playing their part on Irish coins when it was first used in 1928 on the design of the farthing, and later on the 50p coin, before the euro came into use. Woodcock are also popular subjects in art, featuring in many fine art paintings, and are frequently seen adorning annual Christmas cards, decorating the homes of many families in winter.

For much of human history, the Eurasian and American woodcock have proven themselves to be some of the most prized of all wild game birds across the northern hemisphere, as their ability to outsmart the best of hunters and their dogs has to be seen to be believed. Being more than twice the size of a snipe, Eurasian woodcock have a wonderful pattern of rich-brown plumage mottled with black, white, buff, russet and orange, providing perfect camouflage against the woodland ground vegetation; and with its eyes set high on the sides of its head - giving it 360-degree vision - a Woodcock will almost certainly see you before you see it. These are perhaps the reasons as to why it is such a revered and mysterious wild game bird, above all the rest.

While very little is known about the native woodcock of Ireland or their ecology, as far back as the 1890s the first woodcock ringing program began in England. This was followed by two more by 1909, with Ireland becoming involved in the project. The establishment of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in 1933 was another step forward in the development of collaborative ornithology and over the following years, bird ringing in the British Isles saw a profound revolution.

The criteria for becoming a qualified ringer and the code of practice for ringers were put in place, with a licensed permit system introduced, and identification and data-gathering methods were improved. In particular, ring design was improved, and the supply of mist-nets with a guide to their use was readily available.

Progress in making use of the data gained from ringing remained slow at first, especially in the analysis of mortality, as the necessary calculations were tedious in those pre-computer days. As the BTO had just one manual calculating machine, the council was persuaded to invest in electric calculators and later a card-punch machine, the latter allowing data to be prepared for analysis on computers



Woodcock chicks: photo by Joseph McDohaghnging to other bodies. This laid the



Ringing woodcock contributes important data.foundation for the BTO to acquire itsown computer in 1979, allowing thenext director to push computerisationonward during the next decade. Dataprocessing moved in-house and in theearly 1980s the BTO received a grant tocomputerise all past recoveries of BTO-ringed birds.

In 1969, following the withdrawal of financial support for game advice in England, the membership based 'Game Conservancy' was formed. In 1980, it was registered as a research and education charity under the name 'The Game Conservancy Trust'. In October 2007, The Game Conservancy Trust became the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) as it is now widely known as today.

Woodcock on the 'Red List' after sharp decline

Recently, a working relationship has formed between the BTO, GWCT and

University College Cork (UCC). The Bird Atlas 2007-11, published by the BTO, suggests that the breeding range of woodcock has declined by over 70% during the past 40 years. Most of this decline (64%) occurred between the early 1970s and early 1990s, with a further subsequent decline of 22%. Such is the magnitude of the decline that the woodcock is now on the red list, thus is it considered a species of high conservation concern in Ireland.

From 2012 to the present, 7 woodcock were fitted with satellite transmitters in Ireland during the winter. These birds all returned to their breeding sites in the

spring, making significant easterly migrations to Latvia, Norway, Sweden and even Russia. These devices continue to provide valuable insights into the migration of woodcock as the birds make their annual visit back to their wintering grounds in Ireland. This great work was partly funded by the The Cork Federation of Gun Clubs and the The National Association of Regional Game Councils of Ireland (NARGC) with some County Regional Game Councils also contributing.

In May 2017, researchers at UCC lead a national survey which aimed to map the breeding range of woodcock in Ireland, Assisted by funding from the Irish Research Council and the NARGC the national survey got off to a great start with almost 350 of the selected sites being reserved by volunteers across the Republic and Northern Ireland.

The success of site uptake was in part down to the work of many local gun clubs and other interested groups promoting the survey on social media. The method of the survey required the volunteer to spend 75 minutes (15 minutes before sunset and finish 60 minutes after sunset) for two or three evenings in a woodland spread over the months of May and June, recording any displaying, or 'roding' male woodcock that they saw or heard. Sadly, only just over 60 results were returned. The reasons behind the poor returns are unclear, however it is suspected that volunteers may have been discouraged from sending in their results when they had not made any positive sightings of roding male woodcock, or when some found that they could not easily use the online system.

All results can contribute vital information

It is important to highlight that even a null result is still important data; if a volunteer encountered no woodcock during their survey, they are still encouraged to report this result, as it helps to build a clear picture of where breeding woodcock are present, and where they are absent. A particular highlight of 2017 was when Mr. Joseph McDonagh sent forward a photo of a brood of woodcock chicks that he found, while out undertaking some vermin control in his local area. This shows that woodcock are breeding successfully in Ireland, and that much more work needs to be done to protect and enhance further breeding efforts.

Taking computerisation and Facebook a step forward, a number of individuals from different groups across Ireland, England and Wales on Facebook have now joined up as one group: 'Woodcock Ringing in Ireland'. In collaboration with the Woodcock Network, a project is now underway to have members from various parts of Ireland trained and licensed with the BTO and the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), in order to ring more woodcock here in Ireland.



Wing feathers provide information on age.

For offsetting some of the outgoing costs, a big thank-you goes to Albert Titterington for donating a free stand to the Woodcock Hunting in Ireland group at Birr Castle Game Fair in order to help raise the much-needed funding. Over the two days at the fair, many passionate woodcock hunters were made aware of the importance of how to age their retrieved birds by examining their wing feathers, and of the ongoing research that was taking place. Albert also donated a very fine bronze ornament of a Gamekeeper and his dog, along with many more people, to whom we are very grateful, who donated hunting related prizes for a raffle that was held at the game fair. The sale of hunting caps to the Woodcock Hunting in Ireland group members has helped reduce the outgoing expenses for the ringing trainees.

The training program can run for over 3 years, depending on numbers of birds caught and suitable weather conditions, as most of the training can only occur at night. A big thank-you to Declan Coney of the Monaghan Wild Bird Ringing group and James O'Neill of the Belfast and Down Ringing Group, who invited the trainees out for a night's ringing of woodcock in late 2017, and for sharing their expertise on how to catch and ring woodcock, including recording the data required as is standard practice required by the BTO. Over the course of the night, there were three woodcock captured out of seven seen.

The captured birds were fitted with metal leg rings and all biometric data recorded, before the birds were released back into the wild totally unharmed. There are many qualified bird ringers across Ireland who carry out great work on all wild bird species; however, the Woodcock Ringing in Ireland group will be putting their efforts into gathering data solely on woodcock in Ireland, building on a great database which is shared across woodcock enthusiasts all across Europe.

For more information and updates please join the Woodcock Conservation & Preservation Ireland or Woodcock Hunting in Ireland groups on Facebook. And visit the links below:

The Woodcock Network: http://www.ringwoodcock.net/

The British Trust for Orinthology: https://www.bto.org/

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust: https://www.gwct.org.uk/

National Association of Regional Game Councils of Ireland: https://nargc.ie/

The breeding woodcock survey in

Ireland:

http://ornithology.ucc.ie/.../ecolo.../bre eding-woodcock-survey/

Woodcock Watch: https://www.woodcockwatch.com/



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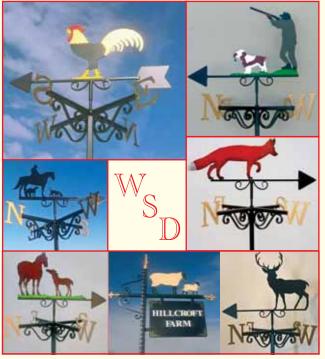


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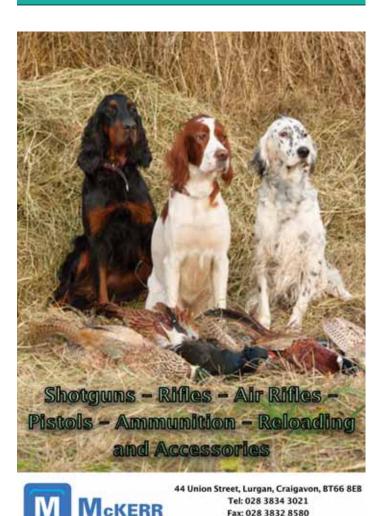
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Hunting with Harris hawks at Gleneagles

It was to feel a little like walked up shooting.

Not every G&T is accompanied by a Harris hawk or a golden eagle zooming over your head, but if you are at Gleneagles during the summer months, you may well be lucky enough to have a live display of these extraordinary raptors while you enjoy your sundowner beside the manicured croquet lawn. While a November visit is perhaps a little too cold for an alfresco pre-dinner drink, it does provide the perfect opportunity to have an outing at live quarry with one of the 40 Harris hawks that reside at Gleneagles, which is exactly what I was there to do.

"Did you know that Harris hawks hunt as a pack?" asked one of Gleneagles' in-house falconers Steve Burdett, before handing me Margo, an 11-year old Harris hawk. "They are like the wolves of the skies, and today you will become part of her pack." Margo's scaly yellow feet gripped my thick leather glove and her head bobbed about as she assessed her surroundings. Steve and I were off to hunt game in nearby woodland - the likes of pheasants, rabbits, mice and voles - using two Harris hawks - Margo and five-year old Angus. "Today will feel similar to walked-up shooting," explained Steve. We humans would act as beaters and the birds would act as the Guns. It would be teamwork.

the world's first dedicated falconry school when it was established in 1982. Having moved to Gleneagles in 1992, the school now instructs more than 3,300 people a year in this ancient pursuit. Owned by Steve and Emma Ford, the school teaches guests the basic techniques. Located just below the newly refurbished tennis courts, part of Gleneagles' multi-million-pound recent overhaul, the Gleneagles' falconry school is cleverly designed, with each hawk chamber having a large window with a perch so that guests can get to know the residents. For sunnier days, there is also a 'weathering ground' of open-sided pens which delight younger guests.

The area has a feeling of a traditional stable block, the sort one would find at

an old grand house – but a trained falcon's housing is called a "mews" which is, incidentally where the word for a small residential street comes from - one of the many terms we use in everyday language derived from the ancient sport of falconry. It was one of many words and terms that I'd learn over the course of the next few hours. When we visited the mews, there were several children pointing excitedly at the enormous golden eagle "Fatty", who was dozing on her perch. "Many people have never seen a golden eagle, let alone seen one so close up," explained Steve, before inviting the children for a tour.

Believe it or not, hawks do not "enjoy" flying. "They fly for only four reasons – hunger, migration, sex and

The British School of Falconry was



I was informed that Harris Hawks hunt as a pack.

fear," explained Steve, adding that Margo was a "BWA". "Bird With Attitude," he quipped. "You'll see what I mean once we start hunting. She will keep Angus in check and be the leading bird in our pack."

Softly spoken with striking blue eyes, Steve has been working for The British School of Falconry at Gleneagles for the past 15 years. When it comes to falconry, he is a veritable font of knowledge – citing numerous cultural and historical references that originated in the sport. "When someone is said to be 'under the thumb' that is an old falconry expression: the leather jesses, which are attached to the hawks' feet, are kept tight under the handler's thumb."

The falconer and bird come to an understanding

Once out the Land Rover both birds of prey immediately flew up into the larch trees to perch on branches. I am not sure what I expected, really, but the hawks patiently waited for us to start beating through the understorey, and it was pretty clear that we would be under their thumb, rather than the other way around. Steve's relationship with these birds was fascinating to behold – it was not one of control, and, unlike the relationship of dog and man, where one obeys and the other is obeyed, there is a more delicate balance. In the end, hawks are wild birds, and the falconer and bird come to an understanding. It was remarkable to watch Steve and the hawks – he seemed to understand what they were indicating, what each flight, movement and screech meant.

As we worked our way through the thickets, the hawks flew short distances ahead, perching on branches to allow us to catch up and to give them the best view. Occasionally, Margo, who was definitely the more dominant of the two, would give a call, as if to tell us to get a move on and stay in line, much like a keeper would his beaters. Margo wasn't only the more dominant, she was also the larger of the pair. Steve explained: "These hawks have reverse sexual dimorphism, like many birds of prey. It means the female has a larger body and is capable of taking larger quarry. So, while Angus can manage a small quick quarry like a red-leg partridge, Margo can catch a big hare."

Both hawks, however, can travel fast when there's quarry in sight, reaching speeds of more than 30 miles per hour. "They're not only fast, though. They have real cunning and form a strategy when you hunt with two, like we are

Margo's sharp profile was visible to my left.



Countrysports and Country Life Spring 201



A hen pheasant bursts from undergrowth and the chase is on.

today." Certainly what I found remarkable was that we were the pack, and we were clearly taking our lead from Margo. A sharp screech indicated her impatience if we stopped for too long, or, if she was in sight, a wiggle of her tail. "Quite a few hawks don't make it to become part of our team – they just don't have the right characteristics. Here, I need to be able to know that I can put any of our mature hawks on a child's fist." All the hawks at Gleneagles are homebred, and selected not only for their hunting prowess but also for their character.

The pheasant, stunned but alive, made her escape

We'd paused momentarily, Margo's sharp profile visible through the trees to the left of us. We'd barely gone 10 paces when, without warning, a hen pheasant got up under my feet. Making her escape to our right, she'd not flown 10 yards when Margo slammed into her, the force carrying them both hard into a tree trunk just in front of us.

As Angus flew in to help, the pheasant, stunned but alive, skittered away under the undergrowth, making her escape. The whole thing was over in seconds, and I was stunned by the silence and swiftness of the hunt. There was something primeval about the event, something that was so natural and wild, and once over, it was as though nothing had happened.

As Steve called in his hawks, rewarding them for their work, we walked back to the vehicle. Margo and Angus may not have produced anything for the table, but the privilege of seeing



A lucky escape leaves only a few feathers behind.

these sharp eyed, sharp beaked and sharp clawed creatures hunting in partnership with man was something I'll never forget. As we drew up to Gleneagles, the eagle crest seemed to take on a new meaning – although, as Steve pointed out, the name Gleneagles does not derive from the eagle. It was, in fact, a bastardisation of the medieval "Glen eglise" or valley of the churches.

I popped back in to the mews before heading back to the comfort of my hotel room. There, serene as could be, Margo sat, and no-one would be any the wiser that, less than an hour before, she'd been flying, missile-like, at a pheasant. The whole thing felt as though it had been stage managed just for me, but it hadn't. It was a rare window, a chance to witness nature, red in tooth and claw. And I'd had the privilege to observe it and to be part of it.

Fact box

Price: 2 hours 30 minutes costs £240 per person or 6 hours costs £399 per person.

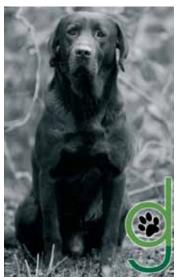
Room rates at Gleneagles start from £275 per night based on two people sharing on a bed and breakfast basis.

The British School of Falconry at Gleneagles: Hawked quarry since opening in 1992: 23,377 Number of instructors: 4 Number of Harris hawks: 40 Number of eagles: 2 golden, 1 steppe, 2 tawny Number of falcons: 4 Average number of guests each year: 3,318 Most popular lesson: Introductory

For more information, visit: www.gleneagles.com.

AT STUD FTCh Barley Laddie of Laggengill

'Alfie' is a lovely big, strong dog, a very powerful and stylish worker. He is a natural game finder.



4 natural game finder. 'Alfie' has qualified for the Irish Championship three times in a row Hips 3/3. CNM and PRA Clear, Eyes Clear.

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Retriever Working Tests Calendar 2018

Details Correct at the time of going to press

Date	Venue	Organisers	Contact	Telephone
3 March	Shanes Castle	Selection Test – Ulster Select	Jim Buchanan	07745 088266
10 March	Shanes Castle	NAGC	Peter Grant	07785 281437
24 March	Glenarm	Ulster Select Final	Jim Buchanan	0774 5088266
2 April	Murley Mountain Wind Farm	Fermanagh Gundog	Gary Wilson	07779 792186.
7 April	Ballydugan Estate	NIGF&SS	Philip Turner	028 9261 1845
14 April	Dobbs	Lab Club	Daniel McKelvey	07714 720055
21 April	Shanes Castle. All entrants get a FREE	Prelim, Novice and Open Tests.	Geoff Peoples	028 9334 2604
	ticket to the Game Fair at	UGRC – Selection test for Shanes		07886 377306
	Shanes Castle	Castle Int. Castle Int. Team	Joe Johnston	07788 927014
				028 8673 6432
28 April	Larchfield	Selection Test for Irish team	William Megaughan	07703 463857
		for Scottish Game Fair		
5 May	Drumcain	Mid Ulster Gundog Assocation	Joe Johnston	07789 927014
				028 8673 6432
12 May	Rademon	UGL	Timmy woods	07860 241617
19 May	Scarva House	NIGF&SS	Philip Turner	028 9261 1845
26 May	Scarva House Int Team Event	Nat Country Fair	Timmy Woods	
27 May	Scarva House Test	Nat Country Fair	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
2 June	Venue TBC	Meningitis Charity	Eddie Moore	028 9094 0123
9 June	Gilford	Craigavon Gundog Club	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
16 June	Clandeboye All entrants get a FREE Ticket to the Game Fair at Shanes Castle	Lab Club	Daniel McKelvey	07714 720055
23 June	Irish Game Fair Shanes Castle		UGRC/ MUGA	
		FEEDWELL Preliminary & Novice	Geoff Peoples	028 9334 2604
		Retriever Tests: RED Mills Spaniel	Joe Johnston	07886 377306
		Tests & Spaniel International		07788 927014
				028 8673 6432
24 June	Irish Game Fair Shanes Castle	Feedwell International Retrievers team event / Open Retriever &	R. McGregor	028 7772 9690
		International Spaniel and Cocker Tests		
30th June		BASC	Eddie Moore	028 9094 0123
7th July	Glenarm	Ulster Select	Jim Buchanan	07745 088266
21 July	Shanes Castle	NAGC	Peter Grant	07785 281437
28 July	Scarva	NIGFSS	Philip Turner	028 9261 1845
4 August	Gosford	Craigavon Gundog Club	Noel Doran	028 3832 5272
I I August		URC	G Murdoch	07768 670022
-	Murley Mountain wind Farm	Fermanagh Gundog Club	Gary Wilson	07779 792186

If you would like publicity for the results of your tests (and of course for your sponsors) could you please Email a short report and a couple of photographs for possible inclusion in the magazine to irishgamefair@btinternet.com

ART & ANTIQUES

Every so often someone will ask me about when to buy antiques and of course which ones to purchase. This age-old question is about as easy to answer as is, "how long is a piece of string?" But let's not evade the query for it is worthy of many answers, all of them valid. In reality it is difficult to determine what is the best time to buy and when is it wiser to avoid going down that road.

So ask yourself why you want to buy an antique item or items in the first place.

Are you driven by a romantic memory of a past you never lived in or is it through a desire to re-create an atmosphere which reminds you of your childhood of that of someone else.

Born to the country, like many of my ilk, I have strong and fond memories of pumping the water from a cows tail pump, dropping a lovely old Willow Pattern plate when my eager young hands tried to rescue it from the shelf of a country dresser or even longing for the sound of an ancient grandfather clock.

All these memories return as clear as a mountain stream whenever I see such items come under the hammer at a house sale or country auction.

Once upon a time I would have signalled a bid almost as soon as the auctioneer had finished describing lot.

Today things in my book are a bit different.

No longer impetuous for a purchase I



Mary Swanzy's 'The storm' went for €100,000 (ADAMS)

quickly size up the item of my interest and ask my inward self why I want to purchase it in the first place.

Would it find a place in my home. Where would it find such an



Jack Butler Yeats, 'By Merrion Strand' sold at for €450,000 (ADAMS)

accommodation or do I really need it occupying valuable space in my garage when it hasn't found a place in my home.

If you are a hardened dealer, assuming they are such beings around in the antique trade these days, then romantic thoughts of the past will have no effect whatsoever on what you intend purchasing.

The mind of the dealer will in most cases focus sharply on buying the item as cheaply as possible, turning it over quickly and harvesting a profit in the process.

Because so many of us don't belong to the 'trade' doesn't mean we shouldn't acquire a bargain.

And here I am talking about the casual buyer, not the collector who if they know their subject, know also what they are prepared to pay and often outbid the 'trade' because profit margins



Basil Blackshaw's 'Night Rider' sold at €90,000 (ADAMS)

don't enter into the scheme of things.

But the initial question we pose will still focus on what to buy and when to buy.

Period furniture has been a good buy for quite a while, primarily because so many people have gone for a minimalist atmosphere in their homes and also because they have fallen in love with space.

For several years now it has been sad to see the lowly prices being paid for well-crafted pieces of furniture.

But the wheel will return and 'brown' furniture will be back in vogue again and when it does unrealistic prices will be paid for it.

In fact, were I twenty years younger I would scour the country picking up all the period furniture I could get my hands on, storing it for a few years and then siting back until the time came to sell it again and watch the profits roll in.

For mark my words, when something has hit rock bottom and has remained in that position for so long, it must rise eventually.

And when it does the waiting will have been worthwhile.

To look at the international art market this summer one could be forgiven for assuming everything was booming with millions of pounds having been paid for items sold through the large sales houses like Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonhams.

But then again consider what they are selling. Paintings by Kandinskey, Freud and Picasso will always command high prices because those who want them are not worried about where their next meal is coming from.

So do the rest of us

have to content ourselves with crumbs?

No, not at all. There are plenty of works today by young Irish and British artists which can be snapped up at good prices. And they too will find a stronger market in the future.

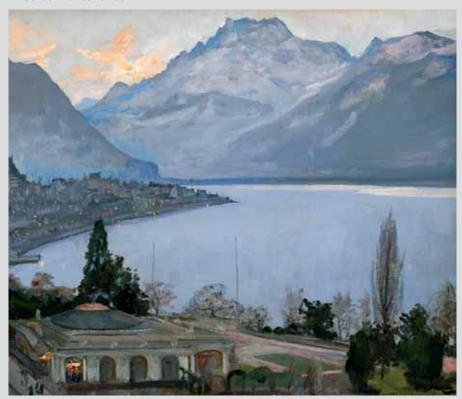
Buy them now, enjoy having them for a few years and when things improve let them go again but not for a song.

Make no doubt about it. There is value for money at the moment in buying period furniture, art and many other things.

But no matter how cheaply you buy, always try to get quality in what you purchase.

Don't be afraid either to get involved in setting up a specific collection, should

F E McWilliam's 'Women of Belfast III' bronze sold for €35,000 (ADAMS)



Sir John Lavery's 'Evening, Montreux sold for €90,000 (WHYTE'S)



Jack B.Yeates' 'The Dodder in Flood' sold for €33,000 (WHYTE'S)

it appear ridiculous to those around you.

Things that are considered quirky, strange, even bizarre at one time are often much sought after and well priced in another time.

Yes, timing is an important ingredient in the mix.

So get out there and start looking. The antiques of the future are staring you in the face at the moment. And tomorrow does come a lot quicker than you think.

Towards the end of the year ADAMS sold a fine Jack Butler Yeats, 'By Merrion Strand' for 450,000 euros followed by Mary Swanzy's 'The storm' at 100,000 euros and a Basil Blackshaw 'Night Rider' from the collection of broadcaster and historian Eamon Mallie at 90,000 euros.

A fine Paul Henry, 'A Kerry Lake' went at 65,000 euros, a Norah McGuinness at 36,000 euros and an excellent F E McWilliam 'Women of Belfast III' bronze at 35,000 euros.

WHYTE'S Dublin reported their best year of auctions since 2007 which is something of a barometer reading on the way things are going.

Among their autumn highlights were: Sir John Lavery, 90,000 euros; Paul Henry 52,000 euros; J B Yeats, 33,000 euros; Basil Blackshaw, 32,000 euros; Dan O'Neill 27,000 euros.

TOP SALES

Dublin based ADAMs auctions Christmas Collection sale saw am impressive silver model of a marching elephant selling for 4,400 euros followed by an 18k gold cigarette case, Birmingham 1871 at 3,700 euros and a large George I Irish silver gilt two handled presentation cup and cover at 2,500 euros.

Six bottles of Taylor's Vintage Port 1970 went for 1,000 euros exemplifying the affection a buyer had for the drink. And making one wonder if it ended up in a cellar collection or was it opened over the festive season.



Daniel O'Neill's 'Girls and Dogs' sold for €27,000 (WHYTE'S)

The 40th ANNIVERSARY ALL IRELAND IRISH GAME FAIR

The Great Game Fairs of Ireland team announce a huge 40th anniversary bonus for all Irish & UK country sports enthusiasts with their largest and most spectacular ALL IRELAND Game Fair ever at Shanes Castle 23/24 June 2018 and their new ROI event at a new venue in the Irish Midlands on the 24/25 August 2019.



For 40 vears real team commitment, marketing flair. meticulous planning and bang up-todate game fairs have ensured that the Irish Game Fair has reached the milestone of its 40th anniversary since its launch at Clandeboye Estate, in North Down, in 1979. The archive photographs published give just a little indication of just how many people have contributed over the years to the success of the fairs since Albert Titterington, Michael Dickey, Stanley Scott, the late Major William Brownlow and the late Major Donald Hoy met at the Royal Ulster Yacht Club in June 1978, to plan Ireland's first major game fair. One year later, it took place at Clandeboye Estate.

In 2018, our NI and ROI fairs will amalgamate for ONE YEAR ONLY to create an ALL IRELAND 40th anniversary showcase for Irish country sports.

Our ROI Fair moving from Birr in 2019

After 10 happy and successful years at Birr, graciously hosted by Lord & Lady Rosse, we decided to seek a new larger site without many of the restrictions and access problems of the Birr site. However, with the Pope and possibly the Queen planning to visit Ireland on the week before and during the traditional weekend of the fair, it was considered unwise to launch a new ROI venue against such competing attractions.

After protracted discussions with key players such as hosts, local councils, funders, police, trade exhibitors and organisers of other events potentially impacted on by us changing date, it became clear that our best strategy for a successful move, was to move the ROI fair to its new Irish Midlands location in a planned fashion in 2019. A brand new ROI fair will be created in the Irish Midlands on the 24th & 25th August 2019 - full details soon.

It's a win, win, win situation!

Now all eyes are focused on the 40th anniversary Shanes Castle event, planned for 23/24 June to make it the largest Irish Game Fair ever including:

- Irish country sports people from all over Ireland get a chance to come together to help create a massive PR showcase to demonstrate the support for the sports in Ireland.
- Enthusiasts from Ireland & GB have discounted admission and



It takes a lot of country sports enthusiasts to put on a Great Game Fair.

special accommodation rates to make a real weekend of it.

- Exhibitors have the opportunity to promote their products to an enhanced audience and visitors can see more trade stands & more attractions.
- Competitors can compete for the biggest ever prize fund in a wide range of international class events.
- All facets of the show, including family entertainment, countrysports, Fine Food and Living History have been enhanced to create a fantastic family weekend.
- This huge anniversary event will carry forward to the ROI event in its new 2019 location.

Countrysports at the heart of the anniversary event

Countrysports has and always will be at the core of our fairs, and our anniversary event at Shanes will bring together a fantastic countrysports programme of events, attractions and competitions with a prize fund unmatched in Ireland.

All competitions will have special 'Ruby Anniversary' Trophies to be won outright:

For Shooting: Apart from a fantastic

prizes including THREE guns to be won, there is the 'Cock & Hen Challenge' with a pair of antique pheasant trophies to be won – the Hen for top gun on the Saturday and the Cock to be won on the Sunday. Can anyone shoot the 'left & right' and take home the two birds?

- **For Gundogs:** Top prizes and real international competition on one of the best gundog courses at any fair and special Labrador, Golden Retriever, Cocker & Springer Trophies to be won outright.
- For Anglers: A major angling section, including the DAERA 'Put & Take' fishery for children; fly tying and casting instruction; and a special trophy to be won outright in the casting competitions.
- **For Ferrets:** Game Fair Championship with special trophies for racing and showing.
- **Stickmaking:** NI Stickmaking Championships and Displays on the CAI stand.
- For Terriers, Lurchers & Whippets – all the major international competitions brought together in one location:
- 1. The 30th Anniversary All Ireland Show & Racing Championships open to all with the Show

Champions qualifying for the Five Nations Championships.

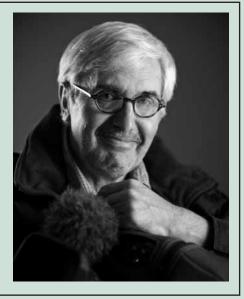
- 2. Paul Pringle's 'Irish Countrysports & Country Life Editor's Challenge' for Plummer Terriers (with Special prizes and the winner qualifying for the now legendary Five Nations).
- 3. The Five Nations Terrier, Lurcher and Whippet Finals – all with fantastic prize funds.
- 4. The Mick the Miller traditional Lurcher race with great prizes including two very special trophies to be won outright.
- 5. The Directors Challenge: Whippet v Under 21" lurcher with two special trophies to be won. And to celebrate the 150th anniversary of McGrath winning his first Waterloo Cup two very special trophies for winner and runner up in the Master McGrath Challenge.
 A huge number of family

attractions in all areas including:

Including an extended tented village of trade stands with several new stands; an extended Living History Festival; an expanded Fine Food & Drinks Festival including a stand from top UK food magazine Delicious, which will be making its Irish Awards at the fair; and a great range of 'have a go' opportunities for the whole family.

'40 YEARS OF IRISH GAME FAIRS' – THE FILM

Film maker Harry Cook, from Image Media Films, has produced a special anniversary video '40 Years of Irish Game Fairs'. Trawling back through hundreds of hours of filming to bring together some of the past highlights and look forward to some of the 2018 attractions, he has produced a thoroughly entertaining programme giving a real authentic flavour of the Great Game Fairs of Ireland. This can be viewed on our website www.irishgamefair.com or at https://vimeo.com/257966780



GREAT ADMISSION DISCOUNTS

- There are a great range of ADMISSION DISCOUNTS and special accommodation and ferry rates to encourage the greatest ever attendance of Irish country sports enthusiasts
- FOR ROI SHOOTERS & HUNTERS: NARGC and Countryside Alliance Ireland members qualify for just £5 or €5 ADMISSION on showing their membership card.
- For IRISH ANGLERS IFI and DAERA Licence/Permit holders qualify for just £5 or €5 admission by presenting a voucher available from your local tackle shop or published in the Summer edition of the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine.
- Subscribers to the Irish Country Sports & Country Life Magazine (cost £20/€25 p.a.) will receive TWO FREE TICKETS (value £20).
- FOR GB COMPETITORS & VISITORS FREE ADMISSION & special ferry rates
- Great range of facebook competitions for Game Fair tickets, magazine subscriptions and other valuable prizes
- Accommodation available from £25 per night: Contact Rose at the Visitor Information Centre in Antrim, Market Square, Antrim (028) 9442 8331 rose.laverty@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

SPECIAL TRADE PACKAGES

This Game Fair will represent the greatest ever Irish opportunity for face to face contact with your customers and potential customers, plus year long contact with the huge 100,000 plus per issue readership in the Irish Country Sports and Country Life magazine. And for you too we are offering special discounted packages - all you have to do is to have at least one very special offer on your stand at the fair.

We invite our fellow countrysports enthusiasts from all over Ireland and GB to be part of Irish fieldsports history, by making this the largest gathering of hunting, shooting and fishing enthusiasts ever. We will have gone all out and done everything possible to create and promote a great programme of competitions and attractions; and by providing a fantastic range of huge value discounted admissions and all of the ingredients for a fabulous country sports weekend – so why not come along to help make it happen. Country sports & Irish Game Fair history is waiting for you! For further information: Call: 028 (from ROI 048) 44839167/44615416 Email: irishgamefair@btinternet.com www.irishgamefair.com Follow us on Facebook and Twitter and on the FREE to Read online www.countrysportsandcountrylife.com



The Great Game Fairs of Ireland need YOUR help

to deliver the greatest ALL IRELAND GAME FAIR EVER & a REAL SHOWCASE to PROMOTE & DEFEND IRISH COUNTRYSPORTS

Think what a celebration of Irish hunting, shooting, fishing and the rural way of life it will be if with YOUR help WE can add these two crowds together at



the 40th ANNIVERSARY IRISH GAME FAIR, Shanes Castle, Antrim On the 23rd & 24th June 2018

We have done our part by adding superb new attractions; organising an extensive and creative marketing and promotional programme; providing great competition with unrivalled prize funds including unique Ruby anniversary trophies to be won outright; and offering huge value discounted admission and excellent accommodation rates.

It is over to **YOU** to join with **YOUR** fellow country sports enthusiasts from all over Ireland and further afield to help create Irish country sports history and be part of the next 40 years of Irish Game Fairs!

See our '40 Years of Irish Game Fairs Video' https://player.vimeo.com/video/258116515

COME TO SHANES AND YOU MIGHT JUST FEATURE IN OUR NEXT MOVIE!

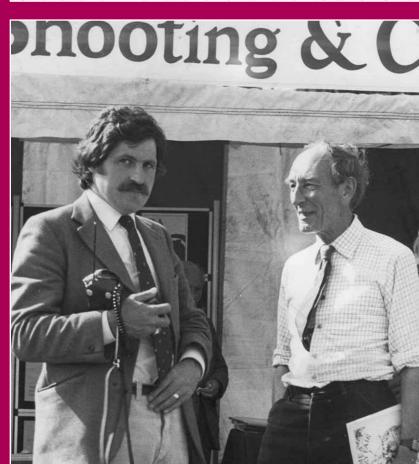
































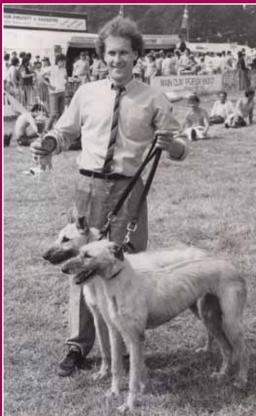






































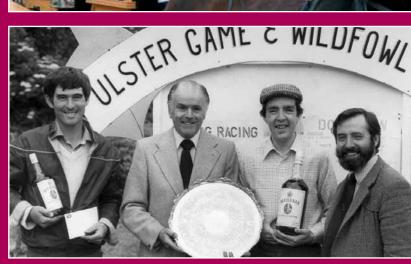


















GLORIOUS GORTIN 2017

The Labrador Retriever Club of Northern Ireland held it's two day Open Qualifying Stake at Gortin, Co Tyrone, on Monday 6th and Tuesday 7th November 201, by kind permission of Ivan Wilson. The trial was generously sponsored by Feedwell.

The Judges were a very experienced and eclectic mix of the best from Northern Ireland, Lancashire and Llanelli, South Wales; on the right of the line were Alan Schofield and John Williamson, and on the left Alan Rees and Gary Wilson.

The Chief Steward was Peter Smith, ably assisted by Club Secretary Daniel McKelvey and Committee Member Jonathan Walsh, Other luminaries assisting with the running of the line included Ivan Wilson, Tommy Hughes and Club Chairman Richard Johnston. The highly effective Guns were chosen by the Society for their accuracy, safety and experience of shooting over competing dogs.

After preliminary announcements in Gortin village and at the Keeper's Cottage, 24 qualified and eager competitors set off for what is now well known as 'the bog behind the house.' This held abundant game of partridge, pheasant and the odd snipe or woodcock, which were expertly flushed by a team of well schooled spaniels. It was great to see again two of Ivan's long time helpers in Brendan Doherty 2028 and John McAuley – dog men to their core and always willing to help. Partridge came readily to hand, and we avoided some of the pitfalls associated with a fence on the right. Unfortunately, temptation of shots, spaniels, and general disturbance proved too much for some early runners and several dogs ran in, or were judged unsteady.

Judging was fair, no quarter was given for excessive handling, particularly on marked retrieves – this was an Open Qualifying Stake, with Schedule J being applied rigorously and with common sense. Showing early promise were Billy Lundy with two dogs, Gary McCutcheon, Tadh Kelly and Eddie Finn.

Reversing back down the bog, the trial continued apace and ,with weather being relatively kind, Keeper Ivan Wilson decided another late sweep would produce game,

which saw the downfall of a further two dogs.

Day one finished with eight dogs remaining which were handled by Peter



Coming in to line on good Gortin ground.



Winner Billy Lundy with his trophies

Colville, David Beattie, Billy Lundy with two, Gary McCutcheon, Sean Kearney, Eddie Finn and Tadh Kelly.

Day two saw the Trial on ground opposite the Keeper's Cottage, sometimes referred to as 'the field of grief.' Careful supervision of the line positioned guns and dogs some way from the point of flush, thus giving ample time for marking.

Some good birds were produced which really tested the remaining competitors and two dogs were lost, while Newcam Boss excelled on a runner. Moving on to the seventh retrieve, the line worked hard to complete the round with a drive from a hillside copse, while Camgart Tommo was severely tested on a snipe. At around one o'cock, stumps were drawn and the Judges declared the Trial over, with six dogs still in the mix. After the usual flurry of paperwork, and feverish speculation, Club Secretary Daniel McKelvey announced the result as follows:

Results:

1st Billy Lundy with Int FTCh The Newcam Boss

2nd Gary McCutcheon with FTCh Camgart Tomo

3rd Billy Lundy with Int FTCh Drumgoose Warlord

4th Sean Kearney with Kelmarsky Bugatti

CoM Peter Colville with Skerryview Alisha at Annaloughan

CoM Eddie Finn with Tirgarve Falcon

The awards were presented by Jamie

Clegg who, through Feedwell, generously sponsors many of our trials and tests. Such kindness should be reciprocated by the trial fraternity when purchasing our dog food. Chairman Richard Johnston thanked all participants, and Alan Rees replied on behalf of the Judges. Billy Lundy expressed satisfaction on his victory in such testing trial ground.

The Labrador Retriever Club of Northern Ireland has been restructured in recent years and under Richard Johnston and his energetic Committee are producing really first class and well organised events. Billy Lundy now goes to the IGL Championship in December with mother The Newcam Boss, and son Drumgoose Warlord, a notable achievement, and one which has not been equalled in recent times . We all wish Billy every success!



Judges Alan Rees and Gary Wilson.



Secretary Daniel McKelvey, Jamie Clegg of Feedwell with Billy Lundy.



Award winners, Judges and sponsors.



Judges John Williamson and Alan Schofield.

The Nigel Carville RED MILLES Red Mills Interview

In this issue Nigel Interviews Declan Boyle

Question: Can I take you right back to the start and ask you what your first dog was and when and how you acquired it?

A: My first dog was a black Labrador bitch which I got from Thomas Hughes jnr in 1999. Her name was Kate, I got her up to a very nice standard as I trained her most days, but she wouldn't have made trials as she was a little shy.

Question: When did you purchase your first Labrador for trialling and what was their breeding and name?

A: My first Labrador which I trained to field trial standard was purchased from Thomas Brady at 8 weeks old, Glenanne Charlie (FTCh Saxaphone Express x FTCh Brookbird Tide). I sold the dog to Lady Waterford, who won a trial with him the following year.

The first dog I ran in trials was FTCh Glenloch Ruff (Ruff), which I bought from Winston Kelly at 11 months old (FTCh Willowyck Ruff x FTW Glenloch Thistle). He was an excellent big dog, brilliant at working tests and field trials. I made him up to an Irish Field Trial Champion.

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

A: My Prefix is 'TULLYAH' It was named after the area where I live.

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

A: The first trial that I ran in was on the Bernish Gun Club's ground at Meigh, Co. Armagh. It was a novice trial run by the Irish Gundog Field and Show Society. I failed on my second retrieve.

Question: With which dog did you win your first Trial and what ground and what quarry?

A: The first trial which I won was

run by the Midlands Retriever Club. I won it with FTCH Glenloch Ruff. The ground was a mixture of large open green fields with some rushes, heather bogs, woodlands and a duck pond, with duck & snipe the quarry.

Question: What breeds of dog have you (a) Trained (b) Trialled?

Answer: I have only ever trained and trialled Labradors

Question: How many Trials have you won?

A: I have won around 21 trials overall (Irish and UK Kennel Clubs) with several different dogs.

Question: How many champions have you made up? What are their names?

A: I have made up three Irish Champions and one GB Champion.

My first one was FTCh Glenloch Ruff (Ruff) and I made him up when he was 4 years old. My second was FTCh Leadburn Jamie (Duke). I bought him from Gerard Conroy and made him up to a Champion when he was 4 ½ years old. Third, was Int.FTCh Miller McDuff (Paddy). I made him up to an Irish FTCh at 22 months and also to a GB FTCh when he was 33 months old.

Question: Which of your dogs to date would you rate as your best dog(s) and why?

A: Int. FTCh Miller McDuff (Paddy) has been my best and most successful dog. He has qualified for the Irish championship 5 times and the IGL 3 times and has brought me to the top level in this sport, winning the Irish Championship in 2017. He was a pleasure to train and has been my most consistent trial and working test dog for the past 3 years. He is good at both driven and walked up trials and is also excellent at working tests. Question: Through your career you must have met, seen and been influenced by many handlers. Can I ask you which of these handlers most influenced and impressed you?

A: I have been training dogs for many years now with many different handlers and groups. I have met and trained with some of the best handlers around. I think the one man from the start who kept pushing me to be better was Jimmy Black. He probably has been my biggest inspiration. We trained for many years together, mostly a couple of times a week. He could always produce a young dog which was capable of running in both working tests and trials at the highest level. Jimmy won the IKC Retriever Championship in 2015 and has made up 6 FTChs.

I have attended the IGL in the UK every year since 2007. It is without doubt the biggest and best gundog competition and usually, every year, the top handlers are there to the very end of day 3. I think one man who has impressed me most in the way that he handles his dogs, is John Halstead jnr. I have watched his displays at the CLA game fairs in the UK; John is able to put his dogs exactly where he wants them at all times; he is an excellent handler.

Question: Other than your own dogs, which have you seen that you would rate as some of the best you have seen or judged? What impressed you about these dogs?

A: Since I have started in gundogs there have been a number of dogs that I have been really impressed with. In the UK it was Mark Demaine's FTCh Calderhey Adder and Andy Latham's FTCh Rimrock Hurricane. They have to be up there with the best that I have



Declan looks for nice temperament in a dog, hunting ability, drive and style plus good health.

seen and I have had the pleasure of competing against both of them. They were excellent at both field trials and working tests.

In Ireland, Billy Lundy's bitch Int FTCh The Newcam Boss' trial career has to be one of the best in Irish gundog history. Winning over 20 field trials, Roxy had the size, style, speed and hunting ability that everyone would look for in a dog. If Billy was a better handler he could have done much more - only jokingl!

Another dog is Tony Rodgers' Highwalk Galway, now a FTW. Over the past 18 months, I have had the pleasure of seeing this dog in training and he is something special. He has the right temperament for trials, brilliant at casting, stop whistle, handling and game finding ability and is one to keep an eye on for the future.

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

A: When judging dogs I look for some different things, depending on the trial. In a driven trial, I like a dog that will cast straight to the area with ease, handle when asked to do so and hunt when asked. I like to see nice clean retrieves. In a walked up trial, I like to see a dog that is good at marking and goes straight to the fall of the birds without needing handling. In both driven and walked up trials, the dogs need to have game finding ability, speed, be good on the whistle and have some willingness to please their handlers.

Question: What changes have you seen over the years when judging and running trials that you think are positive and most negative.

A: Since I started trialling, much has changed in the way judges and handlers

look at dogs. Nowadays, dogs need to be able to go from their handlers to the area of the quarry in a straight line, without disturbing any other ground too much. Dogs need to hunt tighter areas when asked. In driven trials, retrieves have become a lot of long distance work.

On a positive note, there are much more walked up trials run now in Ireland. In driven trials, dogs aren't kept in line as long off the lead as they used to be. A negative - the 'first dog down rule' in walk up. Some trial judges tend to apply the first dog down rule in every situation, instead of looking at the circumstances of the retrieve, even if there is no chance of the dog ever picking the bird.

Question: What food do you use and why?

A: My kennels are sponsored by Wuffitmix dog food and I use the chicken & rice range. I think is an excellent food and it keeps all my dogs in tremendous condition, which you can see in their coat and structure.

Question: As well as a handler, you have established a reputation as a breeder of good dogs and these dogs are in demand throughout the world. Can you tell us which KC recommended screening tests you use? Why you think it is important that breeders should use KC screening tests?

A: I think it is very important that people who are going to breed their dogs should be using the KC screen tests. I test my dogs for Hips, Elbows, Eyes, DNA tests: Pra, Cnm and Eic. People should have the dogs tested before they breed them, to try to prevent dogs being affected of any of these diseases.

Question: What do you look for in a dog and bitch that you are going to breed?

A: When I go to breed a bitch or dog they have to be out of good trial stock. They have to be a nice size and show the qualities that I look for in every dog, such as nice temperament, hunting ability, some drive and style plus good health Question: You must have had many highlights as a trainer and handler as well as some disappointments. Can you share with us your highlights and your biggest disappointment?

A: I have had a lot of highlights since I have started to trial dogs. Winning the Irish Retriever Championship 2017 has to be the biggest. I suppose like every handler in Ireland it is the one competition that they want to say they have won.

Some of the other highlights have to be qualifying for the IGL; making my dog up to an Irish & GB FTCh; representing my country on every international gundog team and winning overall top dog at the Game Fair last year in the UK and at the home international. This is a great sport to be involved in. I don't have any major disappointments, but I suppose it is like every sport with ups and downs.

Question: You have been mainly associated with training Labradors what qualities do you look for in your own dogs?

A: I like my own dogs to be honest, and have a nice temperament. They need to able to work on their own, not only for themselves. I like to have a dog which is a good marker, nice steady speed but not too much as they tend to be harder to control when asked. I like a dog that is able to do both working tests and field trials.

Question: Do you prefer handling dogs or bitches?

A: I have got awards with several dogs and bitches since I have started to compete in competitions, but I would prefer to handle dogs.

Question: Have you trained any other breeds?

A: I have only ever trained Labradors Question: Why do you think is the breed is most suited to your training methods for overall trial success?

A: For my type of trialling, Labradors are the most suited as they have the game finding ability, speed, marking ability and usually are very biddable dogs. They are the breed most suited to the grounds that we trial on.

Question: If you didn't have Labradors which breed would you have?

A: I think that I would only ever have Labradors.

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

A: I train on a couple of different training grounds, mostly on heather bogs. One of them is in Fermanagh called Corbyglen, owned by Gary McCutcheon. This has the perfect terrain; it is a big open heather bog with valleys on each side, high bog turf banks. Retrieves can be made as long as your dog is fit for, and usually you can see the dog the whole way. It is a perfect place for teaching a dog to mark. Running across heather really makes the dogs fit and strong.

Question: What is your favourite trial grounds and why?

A: I have a couple of favourite trial grounds, but Ivan Wilson's ground in Gortin would have to be at the top of my list. It is an excellent ground with different terrains, rushes, heather, white grass and woodlands. Gortin is a tough and unforgiving ground with an abundance of game. I really like trialling in Mohill Co. Leitrim. The trials are run by a local gun club, and members obligingly run about 4/5 trials every season. This has been one of my lucky grounds and I have won trials with all the dogs that I have run on it. The ground is similar to the terrain that I train on.

Question: What sort of quarry do you prefer trialling on?

A: Partridge and pheasants

Question: What ambitions do you hope to achieve in dogs for the future?

A: My future ambitions are to keep training dogs to the best of my ability, keeping qualifying for the Irish and UK championships and perhaps win the Irish again. I would be delighted to win the IGL!

Question: What would your advice be to anyone who wanted to get into trialling Retriever breeds?

A: I would advise anyone that was getting into this sport, to pick

themselves a nice pup from trialling stock with a good pedigree and get into a training group of good positive handlers. If you don't know anyone involved in gundogs there are a couple of different clubs which run group training in the evenings in the spring and summer. Join some clubs and help out at events throughout the season, to get as much experience as you can of what is involved.

Question: Apart from your involvement in training dogs and judging you are well known for having given a lot back through an involvement in clubs and events. Please list of the highlights in this for you and some of the low points.

A: I am the Field Trial Secretary of a couple of clubs with the Irish Kennel Club. I have organised events and gundog training over the last couple of years which helped a lot of new handlers. The highlight for me is seeing new people come into this sport and do really well in competitions, and also seeing a team from Ireland go over to the UK and compete with the other international teams from across Europe.

There are not many low points in running events; it is great to see handlers out running their dogs and enjoying the sport. The only thing is, if I am organising an event I don't usually get to run my own dogs.

Question: How important is it for people to get involved positively in the administration of gundog events and clubs?

A: It is important for people to get involved positively in the administration of gundog events. It teaches about the running of a club, what is involved in the management of field trials and working tests, and gives a greater understanding which can help everyone. Everyone in the sport should have some involvement in one of the clubs, coming to events and helping out, whether it's game carrying, dummy throwing, handing out arm bands, or generally helping in some way.

Question: When not judging, training or breeding, what do you like to do outside country sports? A: Spending time with my family, and I do a bit of line dancing (only joking but most people think I do as it shows in the way I handle a dog).

Question: Do you have dog(s) currently at stud?

A: I have GB & Irish FTCh Miller McDuff standing at stud. He is producing handsome pups with great temperaments.

Any other comments you would like to make?

A: Winning the Irish Championship has been a dream of mine since I started to trial gundogs, but I did achieved this on my own. I would like to thank everyone who has helped me along the way. I would like to thank all the people that I train with, especially the handlers who go to Corbyglen, I think this is the group and the ground which developed my dogs the most in the last number of years; a great bunch of positive handlers and dogs who want to compete at the highest level. I would also like to thank my wife Amelda and daughter Molly for all their patience and having to listen to me talking about Labradors 24/7.



Declan with some of his field trial trophies.

European Snipe Championship for Irish Red Setters 7th - 9th November 2017

The Red Setter Championship competitors before proceedings commenced.

This was a totally new concept in Field Trials, to us at any rate. For the first time, Ireland, through The Irish Red Setter Club, played host to the running of the European Snipe Championship in the huge area of bog-lands around Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Since its inception, this Championship has been held in France and Italy and I can imagine that some might have had misgivings about travelling from foreign parts, not knowing what to expect.

Some European based red setters did compete in field trials here in the past and people such as Ludovic Luchs and others from France are regular visitors here. Along with competitors from Germany, Belgium, France, Scotland, England, Isle of Man, we had many observers from mainland Europe, some also came from Argentina, Greece, Australia (Nice to meet Sandy Peter'ka at last) and America. I can only imagine how they viewed the numbers of snipe seen.

By Tom Dunne

All the Judges made a rough count during each trial with the total exceeding 1380, not including those met in training runs. The organising subcommittee must have fretted as to how the slight difference in rules might pan out, but everything went like clockwork - as Sandy might say: 'No worries.'

On the Sunday, the Gaelic Gundog League kicked off with an International Open Stake for Pointers and Setters, under IKC and FCI Rules in the Moate area with headquarters in Moyvoughly Hall. With 48 dogs entered and 41 parading, the trial was split in two with each pair of judges taking 24 dogs drawn to run in pairs. Under Judges Christy Davitt & Patsy McCarthy for Trial One and Jim Crotty and Edward Flannelly in Trial Two, each pair was down for fifteen minutes and judged on that run alone.

Plenty of snipe, plenty of opportunity



Gaelic Gundog League competitors for the Open Stake held prior to the Championship.

and after the final brace the Judges assessed the performances. With Yves Desdevises' Red setter bitch Honey du Martinville awarded 'Excellent' and CAC in Trial A and Billy Grace of Nenagh's ESB Capparoe Jata also awarded 'Excellent' and CAC in Trial B, so the pair was run in a Barrage with Billy's bitch winning.

Monday was a training day for the overseas competitors to give their dogs a run over what was to them unfamiliar terrain with ample opportunity to meet snipe on several of the smaller bogs. These people reported great work with ample birds available to iron out any kinks after the long journey and prepare for the morrow.

The Irish Red Setter International Breed Stake Commences

Headquarters was Shamrock Lodge Hotel, Athlone. and the event was sponsored by RED MILLS of Co, Kilkenny and DEVENISH NUTRITION and hosted by The Irish Red Setter Club

Day 1. Due to the large entry of dogs, the Stake was divided into two trials with two Judges, Jim Sheridan & Guido Orsan - Jim Crotty & J P Gotti and run on separate bogs. The winners of each were awarded CAC and subsequently run in a Barrage with the eventual winner receiving CACIT and the other dog RCACIT. Ray O Dwyer's Sheantullagh Boss declared the overall winner. Confusing? No, it works very well, but maybe not explained very well!

A new departure for us was the SOLO events where the entry was again divided into two trials with one Judge for each. The purpose of these events is to qualify dogs for Open Stakes here and CAC trials in Europe. Dogs were allotted 15 minutes, if showing enough merit and assessed on their performances. In these trials there are CACs awarded for first, second, third, but no Barrage. In all, there were two Solos on this day, but only one each on the following days as the entry was not large enough to divide them. These were judged by Johnny Mullins and Vincie Flannelly.

Day 2. Again there were two CAC Trials and one Solo event. After the Barrage, Ray O Dwyer's Sheantullagh Boss received CAC/ACIT with Aidan Dunne's Blackstairs Behenny receiving RCAC/RCACIT. Judges were again Jim Sheridan & Guido Orsan / Jim Crotty & J P Gotti

Day 3. As on the previous day, there were two CAC Trials and one Solo. Again Ray O Dwyer's Sheantullagh Boss took the Barrage and Rev. Seamus O Neill's Malstabodarna Balder won the Solo.

Judges assembled and totted up, but with Excellent CAC/CACIT on each day, and Sheantullagh Boss (Filou du Ronde de Beaume x Sheantullagh Stella) was declared a most worthy Champion, winning three CACITS with Aidan Dunne's Blackstairs Behenny (Jamail Adam x Brindille De La Chaire Des Druides) Vice-Champion and so this historic event came to a close.

The Championship Dinner that night had a seating of 64 persons and everyone enjoyed the banter and good



Bird away!

fellowship. Speeches are always a dread, but these were short, just sponsors etc., however an impromptu and impassioned speech from Bob Whinner of Adelaide encapsulated what the event was all about.

Ray O Dwyer had worked, slept and dreamt this Championship for the past year or so. He and his Sub-Committee of Aidan Dunne, Vincie Flannelly and Rev. Seamus O Neill put in a huge shift in organising the event and were fully supported by locals, Jim McCormack, Peter McCormack, Ollie Naughton, Stephen McManus, John Mulligan, Mick Finlass, Padraig Bohan, Johnny Healy and many others in the vital tasks that were necessary for the smooth running of the Championship.

Guides ensured that all competitors reached their particular trial areas through a maze of country roads. The Gun Clubs who cheerfully placed their grounds at the disposal of the Championship and thoughtfully providing access to the bogs through footbridges etc. are to be especially commended. Kristin Jameson, John Phillips and Mr Tea himself – Pat Murray, produced a feast of culinary delights for lunch each day which were devoured with relish!

A huge undertaking

This was a huge first time undertaking that involved considerable expense and simply could not have happened without the huge financial backing of RED MILLS and DEVENISH NUTRITION who were unstinting in their support of the Championship. Bill Connolly even competed with two of his own dogs!

Headquarters was the Shamrock Lodge in Athlone which provided top class accommodation, friendly atmosphere and service at reasonable rates and went out of their way to make each person's stay as comfortable as possible, providing rooms and chalets with ample parking for all vehicles. Food and service throughout was superb.

Secretary, Rev. Seamus O Neill took it all in his stride! With entries taken each morning unorganised bedlam might be expected, but Seamus produced programmes at his ease and oversaw the whole event.

With no dog qualified, I entered my young dog (two in December) in the Solo. This was only his second run in a trial, but he surpassed even my expectations with great running and three quality finds on snipe, one especially difficult with a running bird. I was delighted with his performance and more so at the end when he received RCAC. This qualified him to run in the following day's trials, but with my port hip already replaced and my starboard knee acting up bigtime, I counted my blessings. There will be other days.

My overall impression of the event was that the Irish Red Setter is alive and well. The standard of dogs overall was excellent and people are gradually beginning to appreciate snipe as a quarry species in field trials. A glance at the results elsewhere will show that there is an intermingling of Irish and European dogs and this very much appears to be for the betterment of the breed. It was great to see the awe of our foreign visitors at the numbers of snipe, something we take for granted. It was a well-run, well supported and well attended Championship that could and should be run here again.

Finally, a word of condolence is due to Frederico Tattaneo who journeyed from far away Argentina only to find that no one else spoke Spanish!

IRISH RED SETTER EUROPEAN SNIPE CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS

Champion: Mr. Ray O'Dwyer's Sheantullagh Boss Vice Champion: Mr. Aidan Dunne's Blackstairs Behenny 3rd Mme. Sophie Iuchs's Gala de Val

des Mordorées

4th Mr. Pat Reape's Ballinahemmy Mike

5th Mme. Myriam Byn's Isles of Jura du Pied du Mont



Mr. Ray O'Dwyer was the Championship Winner.





The 2018 Kennel Club Cocker Championship was held at Sandringham Estate on 8th & 9th January, by kind permission of Her Majesty The Queen.

Sandringham Estate is renowned for its wild game, conservation and is under the watchful eye of Head Gamekeeper Mr David Clark. David and his team of top class under keepers did an excellent job over the two days of the Cocker Championship and indeed for months previously in the lead up to the fixture.

This was the fifth occasion since 1993 that the Kennel Club Cocker Championship was welcomed to Sandringham Estate. The facilities laid on were second to none with parking, toilet facilities, catering provided by a local facility, the actual ground and the amount of wild game simply made you think that this was the 'X Factor' of our sport.

The Cocker Championship was sponsored by Eukanuba Pet Food. Judges for the event were Jon Bailey, Richard Claydon, Malcolm Taylor and



Winner Jamie Smith and FtCh Abainn Flawless.

Dai Ormond, who are no strangers to success in the field. Chief Steward was John Dickson, a role he carried out with precision and with a great smile throughout both days.

The organisation for such an event takes great planning and Jon Kean and his Committee left nothing to chance as they had planned with military precision, alongside David and his team. With 45 Cockers qualifying and 40 actually participating one cannot afford to have any errors.

All the top handlers were represented with some new faces putting up the challenge for the pinnacle prize of overall winner.

DAY 1

The opening day started bright and overcast but some dogs did shine, like Natalie Cannon's FTCh Countryway's Alice of Craiwarn with a super retrieve only to be eye wiped on her second by the legendary Ian Openshaw of the Rytex Kennel.

Others which showed promise on Day 1 were Matthew Farish with Bailey's Pure Gold covering lovely ground but failing on her retrieve, Ivan Wilson, who was the only qualifier from Ireland, had a hunt and retrieve with a very talented dog FTCh Ardcaein Chance, bred by Mark Stewart of the Ardcaein Kennels in Ireland.

Will Clulee has no less than five dogs



Her Majesty The Queen enjoying the action.

participating with three receiving COMs for his hard work He has won it outright on three occasions previously, 1998, 2009 and 2012. Ian Openshaw had also five dogs between Wendy, his wife, and himself in this year's Championship receiving a COM but he has also won it on five occasions, in 1999, 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2014.

Sam Thatcher's bitch Windwithe Solitaire of Strigidae was very consistent though both days in her hunting & retrieving.Carl Colclough's FTCh Equinecho Special Tribute had a super first retrieve, but no luck afterwards.

DAY 2

The second day brought some great dogs to our view, like FTCh Heolywlch Denman run by Garreth Davies, Broadmeaform Beau who was a little unlucky on a running cock, Windwithe Night handled by N Gregory, FTCh Jackstea Ted of Poolgreeen, FTCh Dakotagun Arwin who had been in the awards in 2017, and FTCh Tiptockjack Ahay handled by L Cooper a dog which actually 'shredded' the ground in her run along with two lovely retrieves.

There was a great crowd of spectators from all over the world, including Ireland (Domhnall Creamer & Dave Murphy), Sweden, Denmark, USA and the United Kingdom, but one could not have expected the casual walkabout about and enjoyment shown by Her Majesty The Queen, who was watching everything to do with the dogs, enjoying the action and commenting on the dogs and guns participating.

Results:

1st FTCh Abainn Flawless Jamie Smith 2nd FTCh Holywich Denman Garreth Davies 3rd Spiriteddawn Mystic Andy Waterhouse 4th Windewithe Solitaire of Strigidae Sam Thatcher COM: FTCh Ardcaein Fall of Delphaven K Varty FtCh Croimhor Turn of Poolgreen, W Clulee Episcopi Kiwi, Mrs S Jones Gatekeeper Bryn of Nedershot W Clulee FTCh Jackshea Ted of Poolgreen W McClulee Windwithe Winter Night N Gregory FTCh Dakotagun Arwin J Atkinson FtCh Bishwell Barcud S Morgan FtCh Tiptopjack Ajay L Cooper

One could conclude by saying this is a large social event where all the people in the Cocker world come together to view the best dogs in our sport. Unfortunately, while some dogs did shine, the occasion got to others, but that is what the sport of trialling is about.

Next year's event will be held at Arbury Hall and I hope to see you all there.



Time for a smile.



(Above) Sam Thatcher receiving 4th place and Guns' Choice.

(Below) Ivan Wilson with FTCh Ardcaein Chance - the only qualifier from Ireland.





(Above) Winner Jamie Smith receiving his award from Her Majesty The Queen.

(Below) Her Majesty The Queen with Mr Jon Kean, Chairman of the Cocker Championship Committee.



Braque St Germains in Action

Braque St Germain Winni struggles to see as she retrieves another grouse.

First a confession. Although I knew vaguely that they were a French pointing breed, until I received Annette Kastner's email I had no idea what Braque St Germains looked like. Luckily I had a copy of Craig Koshyk's excellent book 'Pointing Dogs – The Continentals' handy and I soon discovered that a Braque St Germain is a French Hunt, Point and Retrieve breed that looks remarkably like an orange and white English pointer – not surprising considering that they supposedly originated from a cross between an English pointer and a Braque Francais.

Annette is a Braque St Germain owner from Bavaria and she was bringing a party of fellow BSG enthusiasts together with their dogs across to Scotland in September to shoot grouse and partridge. She wanted photographs of the dogs at work and wondered if I would be able to come along with the camera and oblige.

Being mad keen on pointers, partridges, grouse and grouse moors and every kind of shooting, I was only too happy to accept and a few weeks later an early start and a trip across to the Borders found us in the Lammermuirs on a sunny September day, drinking coffee and eating cheese scones in Doug Virtue's kitchen.

Doug runs Lammermuir Game Services and offers a variety of shooting from driven grouse, partridge and pheasant to mixed walked up days, flighting and roe stalking. The plan was to spend the first day on the moor after grouse and the second on the lower ground where partridge, snipe and perhaps more grouse would be found. Annette and Karole Richards were going to handle Winni and Weika the two Braques while Winni Kaufer, Sebastian Schreiber and Stefan Hoppe were the Guns.

The drive out to the beat was interesting as the ground got steadily rougher until only the big 4x4s could continue. We walked the last couple of hundred yards onto the moor, where Doug Virtue outlined the plan for the day. Head Keeper Jez Thornton was in charge and Ian Hendy from Castle Gunmakers had brought along guns and cartridges together with his springer and Italian Spinone in case the Braques needed help with the retrieves. Jez had a cocker and Doug a springer, Annette had brought along a beagle and there was also a Doberman whose role in the proceedings was somewhat uncertain.

The towers looked foreboding

Dominating the view across the heather were two tall, round stone towers known as the Twinlaw Cairns. They commemorate a rather sad story where a Scottish Chieftan called Edgar lost one of his infant twin sons to Saxon raiders who raised the kidnapped boy as their own. Years later, the Saxons raided again and were confronted by Edgar and



Retrieving a grouse.

his warriors. As a sort of pre-match opener two of the warriors engaged in individual combat that ended with one dead and the other dying – at which point it was discovered that the two were the long-separated twin brothers. The towers – built to commemorate the sad event - have a rather foreboding look even in the sunlight of a September morning and must have a powerful aura on a wild winter's night.

But, we were here to shoot grouse and were soon making our way across the moor with one of the Braques ranging out in front of us. Not only do they look like our own pointers but they cover the heather in grand style with good pace and, as the day proved, excellent stamina. Their experience on game birds has been very limited to date: as Annette said, 'We only have one pheasant in Bavaria and we are not allowed to shoot it.' Prior to this they have mostly retrieved cormorants – yes, I raised an eyebrow too – on which there is an EU bounty in Germany.

Never having seen or scented grouse before was clearly no handicap because both Winni and Weika proved themselves more than capable of finding birds and looked to have good noses. The grouse though were not very cooperative and were reluctant to sit when the dogs pointed them: not surprising with damp heather and a fresh breeze this late in the year.

A bird that swung back on the wind as was cleanly killed

Even so, Winni Kaufer soon had the first grouse in the bag when Weika flushed a bird that swung back on the wind as was cleanly killed. Weika swooped for the retrieve to complete a double first for dog and Gun. We worked our way across to a stone dyke on the edge of the moor where we stopped for snacks and drinkies, then took a beat back to where the trucks were parked adding another grouse or two to the bag on the way.

I had been a little puzzled by the amount of grouse droppings we were seeing when there were relatively few grouse showing. After a break for lunch the reason for this became apparent when we worked our way over a low rise onto a more sheltered part of the beat. A big pack of birds - Jez estimated over three hundred and I suspect this may have been a conservative guess rose well in front and departed stage right and across the march. It is unusual to see grouse in packs this early in the season but the grouse is a wild bird and does what it wants, not always what we would like it to do. We carried on round the hill and with the dogs still going well and finding the odd stragglers the bag at the end of the day was two and a half brace. Winni Kaufer saluted the birds with a call on the hunting horn: a nice touch that shows a proper respect for the quarry.

Winni brought in a live snipe showing us his a good soft mouth

The plan for the following day was to work over some lower ground on the edge of the moor where a mixture of white grass, rushes, bracken and heather promised the possibility of partridge, snipe and pheasant with still the chance of a grouse or two. We hadn't gone far before Sebastian reacted quickly to drop



Weika retrieving another grouse.



Winni retrieves a snipe on the second morning.

a snipe that Winni brought in alive to Karola showing us what a good soft mouth he has despite his previous experience with cormorants. A little later Weika pointed and then pegged a blue hare that was too slow to get into its running but apart from this one anomaly both BSGs retrieved their birds quickly and gently, marking well and working persistently when game was tucked in under cover.

We saw a few grouse that were quick to take to the wing and an odd snipe, but after that first snipe most of the shooting on the second day was at partridge. There were plenty of birds among the bracken banks and rushes but they were quick to flush and brought the best from the Guns with several being dropped at longish range. The Braques retrieved every bird except one that had run and was finally found after a team effort by Ian Hendy's springer and Spinone. With that bird safely in the bag we stopped for lunch and a team photograph before dropping down to some lower ground for a final foray after partridges.

This beat was a little more sheltered and the partridges sat tighter which made it easier for the Braques to show their pointing ability and incidentally give Stefan Hoppe his first partridge, cleanly killed and nicely brought to hand by Winni. A very fit brown hare showed a clean pair of heels to both Braques and brought howls of protest from Annette's beagle Jeite who clearly thought she should have been allowed bit of free hunting with such a tempting quarry afoot.

We ended the day dining on grouse and partridge breasts with black pudding and rowan jelly complimented by a very pleasant German Riesling and a tot of Scotch whisky – a fitting finale to two days of great dog work and some smart shooting that saw grouse, partridge and snipe in the bag plus one unfortunate blue hare. Considering that this was the Braque St Germain's first chance to work proper game - in Germany they have only worked on cormorants, boar and deer – they did remarkably well and showed great stamina, good noses and some top quality retrieving. Add some good shooting and great company and you have the perfect recipe for two days sport in the beautiful Lammermuir hills.



A moments pause with storm clouds in the background for Jez Thornton, Ian Hendy, Annette Kastner, Karola Richards, Sebastian Schreiber, Winni Kaufer and Stefan Hoppe.



The morning's briefing before setting off for grouse.



Stefan Hoppe's first partridge.



(Above) Winni Kaufer takes a grouse from Braque St Germain Weika – a first for both Gun and dog.

(Below) On the alert as one of the Braque St Germains hunts through the grass and heather.



Retrieving a partridge.



A rest at elevenses for Winni Kaufer with Braque St Germain and beagle Jeite.



The team: Georgina Hudson, Ian Hendy, Annette Kastner, Winni Kaufer, Stefan Hoppe, Jez Thornton, Sebastian Schreiber, Karola Richards, and Doug Virtue.



David Hudson

The Any Variety Spaniel Championship 2018

The Gallery on Day 1

The Any Variety Spaniel Championship 2018 was held on 15th to 17th January at The Buccleuch Queensberry Estate, Dumfries, by Invitation of The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry KBE DL. The Judges were Carl Colclough, Alec Coutts, Dai Lloyd and Stuart Morgan. Chief Steward was Steve Russell and Steward of the Beat, Rab Clark. The Championship was sponsored by Skinners, BASC, Marsdens Game Feeds.

In all there were 57 entries of which there were 40 bitches and 17 dogs. The event used to be called the Springer Championship, but is now known as the Any Variety Spaniel (Excluding Spaniel (Cocker)) Championship, thus opening the way

for any minor breed spaniels that qualify to take their place alongside the springers. As it happened all fifty-seven runners were springers but hopefully future years will see the odd Clumber or Field spaniel showing its paces alongside the springers.

The opening



The winner - Mick Walsh and Int FTCh Hollydrive Sally.

the scenic route caught up. The early runners started along a bank planted with young trees and for a while it was difficult to see much of the action. Even when the trees thinned out a bit the ground cover - brambles and bracken was still challenging for both dogs and humans but, as always at Drumlanrig, there was plenty of game to keep the dogs and the Guns: Peter Fawcett, Steve Colmer, John Palmer, Ian Openshaw and Rab Clark: busy.

The pheasants were mostly running ahead through the cover, but enough sat tightly, along with a decent number of woodcock, to ensure that all the runners had the chance of finding birds. The shooting was difficult especially for the Guns in the centre of the beat where birds were quickly out of sight among the trees. Those that broke out on the flanks provided slightly easier chances for the wide Guns and game came steadily to hand. At the end of the bank



Mr C Lewis takes a pheasant from Gorsebay Snipe under the eyes of Judge Carl Colclough.

we doubled back through a more open stretch of woodland then turned into another thick conifer planting.

Handling could not have been easy

There was a lot of game in this strip, though at times it was difficult to know what was happening as pheasants rose ahead of the line. I was standing on a track behind Peter Fawcett and was impressed with the easy way he dealt with birds swinging across the narrow open space above us. Handling the spaniels on their retrieves cannot have been easy with the very restricted viewing and once a dog was sent for game it was largely a matter of waiting and trusting the dog to get it right.

Some of the beat was more open where trees had been felled recently but there was always plenty of ground cover with rushes supplementing the bracken and briars as well as tangles of brashings from the forestry operations. Head Keeper and Steward of the Beat, Rab Clark, made sure the line worked the best of the cover and Judges Carl Colclough, Alec Coutts, Dai Lloyd and Stuart Morgan were kept busy as they worked through the card. There was a brief break for lunch before we pressed on through the afternoon until the light faded.

Heavy snow had been promised for

the second day, and for once the forecasters were spot on. It had turned much colder overnight and the track to the Honeyhole beat was frozen and slippery. The first half a dozen dogs ran in fairly open woodland but the cold and the disturbance had pushed the pheasants on through the open ground and into a long strip of clear fell where the cover was thicker. Conditions were really testing here with a blanket of snow hiding all sorts of pitfalls underfoot and the Judges and Guns deserve tremendous credit for sticking to their task despite this and the snow that fell steadily for much of the day.

The quality of the spaniel work was generally excellent with pheasants

tucked in tightly requiring the dogs to show real drive and at times a great deal of courage to batter through the brambles and brashings. Shooting was a little easier with the pheasants and woodcock being in clear sight above the undergrowth though the swirling snow didn't help matters. Ian Openshaw on the left flank was mostly spot on with his twenty bore and impressed a trio of American visitors with the seemingly limitless capacity of his hip flask. The sun did break through at odd moments, one of these inevitably occurring just as we broke for lunch. We doubled back towards the tall trees in the afternoon and finished with just half a dozen runners still to be seen to complete the card.

Down to the last 6 dogs

Peter Fawcett had been replaced in the Guns team by Tam Forgie and there were still twenty-six dogs in contention as we drove along icy roads to the Farm Strip beat to complete the card. We were in mature, fairly open woodland for the final morning with plenty of cover for the pheasants, woodcock and occasional partridge. The last six dogs ran with mixed fortunes and then there was a pause while the four Judges got together to deliberate. After a short, and for the competitors no doubt tense, pause Chief Steward Steve Russell called for four dogs to come forward and take part in a run off. These were Mick Walsh's Int

(Below) Mrs M Emery's FTCh Palmarrion Defender retrieving a cock pheasant.





Shooting in the snow on the second morning.

FTCh Hollydrive Sally who ran with Simon Dixon's FTCh Chinechgook Dawn Run of Dawsonlee and then Des Donnelly's Hollydrive Abbey and Geoff Devine-Jones FTCh Syncerus Sinbad. All four hunted well though no doubt nerves were jangling among the handlers with, at this stage, everything to lose if a mistake was made. Thankfully there were no last-minute snags and finally the Judges announced 'Trial over' and it was back to the castle for lunch.

It was a tense wait – and it must have felt even more so for the competitors – before Spaniel Club Chairman Anne Greeves called us together to hear the results. First there were presentations to be made to the Judges, Guns and the sponsors: Skinners, BASC and Marsdens Game Feeds. Mike Marjoram from Skinners received a special award in recognition of the many years when he has provided coffee, soup and rolls at field trials and then it was time for Liz Russell to announce the awards.

Quality of work was always good

It says a lot about the quality of work in this Championship that there were twenty-four awards to be made. Liz started by calling forward the twenty winners of Diplomas of Merit then got to the four main prize winners who received their trophies from Anna Ferguson, representing the Duke of Buccleuch who was unable to be with us for the final day.

In fourth place was Geoff Devine-Jones' FTCh Syncerus Sinbad with Simon Dixon's FTCh Chinechgook

nutegenerosity as our hosts for the threeunceddays. Most of all Mick wanted to paycastletribute to his wife Mary for all hersupport over the years.st haveAlec Coutts followed Mick with hisors -own tribute to Rab Clark and his teamoneof Guns and to the Estate for three greatthedays of trialling where, despite theons toweather, Rab and his team had producedthegame exactly as required. In hisprogram notes the Duke of Buccleuchcjoramconcluded with 'I hope everyone enjoysawardthe three days.' I certainly did despite

Dawn Run of Dawsonlee in third.

Hollydrive Abbey and the winner -

greeted with a tremendous roar of

emotional as he stepped forward to

thank the Judges, the Guns and of

course Buccleuch Estates for their

applause - was Mick Walsh's Int FTCh

Hollydrive Sally. Mick was clearly very

Runner-up was Des Donnelly's

frozen fingers and the occasional fall in the thick cover. The quality of work was always good and at times quite outstanding and Mick Walsh can be justly delighted at coming out top over such an excellent field.

Results:

Winner Mr Mick Walsh's Int FTCh Hollydrive Sally Second Mr Des Donnelly's

Hollydrive Abbey

Third Mr Simon Dixon's FTCh Chinechgook Dawn Run of Dawsonlee

Fourth Mr Geoff Devine-Jones' FTCh Syncerus Sinbad

Guns' Choice Mr Steve Blackwell's FTCh Luthmhor Draco

Diplomas of Merit

Mr S. Worthington's FTCh Tortrix Ace; Mr. R Wells' Marketgate Dixie; Mr W. Clulee's FTCh Murrayeden Boss of Poolgreen; Mr P. Matthews' Broomfield Lori; Mr E. Scott's FTCh Broomfield Tara; Mr R. Mackintosh's Sliabh Sunset of Crispico; Mr C. Lewis's Gorsebay Snipe; Mr S. Blackwell's FTCh Luthmhor Draco; Mr B. Watkins' FTCh Simonside Doris of Laysan; Mr W. Drummond's FTCh Buccleuch Imrigh; Mr P. Avery's FTCh Deepfleet Van Persie; Mr D. Rayner's Carnteel Mayhan of Woodash; The Duke of Buccleuch's FTCh Cowarnecourt Jonguil of Buccleuch handled by Mr D. Lisett; Mr E Scott's FTCh Broomfield Annie; Mr C. Thurston-Woolnough's FTCh Springervill Rosie Girl; Mr D. Hammond's Winwick Whisper; Mr J. Dransfield's Dunbrigg Early Purple; Mr S. Dixon's FTCh Dawsonlee Heather; Mr E. McAuley's FTCh Lisgarvagh Jet; and Mr N. Powell's Boundarymoor Dinky.

Simon Dixon's FTCh Dawsonlee Heather retrieves a cock pheasant through the snow.





Ready to start off in the snow on the second morning.



The four dogs for the run off were Geoff Devine-Jones' FTCh Syncerus Sinbad, Mick Walsh's Int FTCh Hollydrive Sally, Des Donnelly's Hollydrive Abbey and Simon Dixon's FTCh Chinechgook Dawn Run of Dawsonlee.



The Judges were Dai Lloyd, Stuart Morgan, Carl Colclough and Alec Coutts.



(Below) Peter Hammond of sponsors Skinners, winner Mick Walsh and Anna Ferguson representing the Duke of Buccleuch with the Championship trophies.





(Above) Alec Coutts and Carl Colclough compare notes in the snow.

(Left) Champions 2018 - Mick Walsh and Int FTCh Hollydrive Sally.

> (Right) Mick Walsh's Mountview Heidi.

(Below) The Guns on the final morning were Tam Forgie, Steve Colmer, Ian Openshaw, Rab Clark and John Palmer.

IGL Retriever Championship



The 2017 IGL Retriever Championship was held at Out Rawcliffe in Lancashire, by kind permission of the Holden family, owners of Hi-Fly Hatcheries Limited. The trial took place over three days from 4th to 6th December and was judged by Roddy Forbes and Sarah Gadd on the right, with Allan Schofield and Judy Rainey on the left of the line.

The ground was mainly sugar beet in large acreage, intersected by deep dykes and hedges which were to prove challenging to some competitors.

For those of a statistical mind – there were 58 starters, including 2 Golden Retrievers, 19 were bitches, and 35 starters had achieved FTCh status prior to the Championship. Game was predominately driven duck, walked up pheasant and partridge, with some snipe and pigeon.

Headkeeper Kevin Hughes worked

tirelessly to ensure a steady flow of game, but along with members of the IGL Committee had been very worried about the storm and flood conditions which had persisted in the area for many days two weeks prior to the commencement of the Championship.

The ground which we were to work had been a lake for a few days and, but for herculean work by Hi-Fly staff, the trial may have been in doubt. That we had three excellent, sometimes 'different' days is ready testament to the hard work done by all concerned. The Guns on all three days were members of the Holden family and their clients and friends and they shot

excellently. The main sponsor was again Roger Skinner, whose hospitality is unbounded. The contributions made by subsidiary sponsors was well received and much appreciated.

The Irish challenge

The Irish challenge was led by Billy Lundy with mother and son



Mr lacona casts his dog.



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Winner David Lisett (centre) with his trophies and Judges (I-r) Roddy Forbes, Sarah Gadd.

combination Int FTCH The Newcam Boss and Int FTCH Drumgoose Warlord, along with Andrew Rooney and Ir FTCH Calderhey Evan, John Williamson and Int FTCh Gortons Gaelic Prince, Tadhg Kelly with FTCh Carrickview Holly, and John Barr Jnr with Int FTCh Willowmount Regal Rose.

Early starts were the order of the day and at 7.00am on 4th we gathered for briefings, photographs, announcements and other preliminaries (including bacon butties) before the first shot was fired at 9.00am and Dawn Scott with Diglake Jasmin retrieved to hand and got the trial under way.

In a large field of sugar beet we progressed quickly, stopping the line at times so that duck could be driven, providing up to ten retrieves on occasions. This required the dogs to be handled to a designated area, which some were clearly not accustomed to. These conditions were however similar to those experienced at Windsor in 2014.

Dogs to show early were Dick Sorley with Baldarriebank Bombshell of Denbank, who had an eyewipe on a running white pheasant (there were reportedly 600 such white birds on the estate). Mark Demaine with FTCh Leacaz of Caytonfell was also tidy and Kirsty Cousins pulled off a magnificent two-dog eyewipe over a huge drain and in to standing maize with FTCh Dunjailin Rocky Rogue of Westerkames.

Light was beginning to fade as the first round ended, but not before Dawn Scott with Diglake Jasmin and John Barr Jnr with Int FTCh Willowmount Regal Rose were eyewiped by the Judges.

The day had been ponderous at times, and due to the stop/start nature of the work, it was difficult to assess how many dogs would proceed to day two, but after the Judges did the books, secretary Sandra Onens was able to announce to an expectant gallery that 40 were required for the second day. Scenting conditions on all days were good and were helped by fair weather together with a slight breeze.

Day 2

Day two was on similar ground to the first with mainly beet and watery splashes, and almost immediately produced drama when a snipe was shot on to stubble over a drain. The first three dogs failed to make the area but Steve Richardson with FTCh Birdsgreen Cluedo of Wedgnock made no mistake, with an impressive technical eyewipe. This second round of one retrieve progressed quickly and it was obvious that the Judges were incisive in punishing indifferent work.

Among those who had noteworthy retrieves were the ever popular Norman Onens with FTCh Kestrelway Freddie, John Halsted with FTCh Brocklebank Navigator of Chatsworth, Jayne Coley with FTCh Flagonhall Hermes of Waterford, Steve Newitt with Dislike Charlie, and Wayne Mitchell with Labdon Ruddy. At the end of the second round, 27 dogs remained.

The trial continued in to the next round with some challenging work on retrieves which where possible were across a 150 yard line. From an Irish perspective, Billy Lundy with Int FTCh The Newcam Boss, Tadhg Kelly and Andrew Rooney were all eliminated for failures or indifferent work.

However, spectacular work was seen from Steve Richardson and FTCh Birdsgreen Cluedo of Wedgnock, when he achieved a further three dog eyewipe on a partridge in stubble and thus eliminated Victoria Pritchard, our own John Williamson, and the current champion David Latham.

David Lisett with FTCh Buccleuch Xena, having kept very clean up to now, started showing exceptional work and made a smart job of a wounded duck which landed on a deep water splash some 200 yards behind the line.

It seemed incredible at the end of day two that the trial had progressed to the point where the secretary announced that only 13 dogs were required for the third day. Furthermore, five of the thirteen had been sired by dogs from Jayne Coley's Waterford kennel.

Day 3

Day three, in mild and dry conditions meant a stretched line of some 200 yards in beet, with cross retrieves being the order of the day. Unfortunately for Billy Lundy with Int FTCh Drumgoose Warlord, the first bird shot was a pheasant behind the line and over two drains and a lane. Not having marked the bird, Warlord struggled and was called up, which ended Irish hopes. This bird was picked by Wayne Mitchell with Labdom Ruddy. Everyone present now knew we were entering a critical phase of the Championship, when every piece of work would be under severe scrutiny.

Unfortunately for Steve Richardson, his worst fears were realised when a cock pheasant was shot which ran. After brilliant work on day 2, Steve was eliminated first dog down, after all four in line were tried but failed to pick. Norman Onens then had a nice pick with Freddie of a white pheasant in a drain. Two very clean competitors were then eliminated when Jayne Coley's dog moved on a flushing bird, and Wayne Mitchell with Labdom Ruddy blinked a white pheasant in open cover.

The field was now cut to five as we lined up for the final drive, while Alan Rees assembled an international team of expert markers to ensure pinpoint accuracy for Judges and Competitors. After two retrieves each, and no mistakes, we retired to HQ where, after much deserved thanks to all concerned, the results were announced as follows:

Results

1st FTCh Buccleuch Xena Lab bitch Born 03.04.14 Breeder/Owner The Duke of Buccleuch Handler David Lisett Sire FTCh Waterford Ganton x Buccleuch Unity

2nd FTCh Kestrelway Freddie Lab dog Born 09.01.11

Breeder/Owner Sandra Onens Handler Norman Onens

Sire FTCh Waterford Fergus x Nobsquinton of Kestrelway

3rd FTCh Leacaz Ricky of Caytonfell

Lab dog Born 12.03.11

Breeder L Hartis Owner/Handler Mark Demaine

Sire FTCh Garronpoint Rye of Lincswold x Rimrock Redstart of Leacaz

Diploma of Merit

The Duchess of Devonshire's FTCh Brocklebank Navigator of Chatsworth handled by John Halsted

Steve Newitt's Diglake Charlie Owner/Handler

For the winner David Lisett and the Buccleuch Estate, this represents 'mission accomplished,'as fourteen years ago David was recruited to reestablish the renowned Buccleuch Kennels, which were influential along with Malmesbury in introducing the Labrador as a breed to Britain circa 1900. Having already won the British and Irish Spaniel Championships, David can be rightly proud of his achievements, and Buccleuch dogs of any breed are again a considerable force.

This was a highly successful Championship. At 3pm on the first day it seemed impossible that we would have manageable numbers for the following rounds to conclusion, but solid Judging, good use of game, and a massive collective effort, ensured a first class trial and result.

On a personal level, it is always good to meet old friends and make new ones, and as a Press Corps we were superbly looked after by Clare Wood, Tom West and the evergreen Tess Lawrence, who ensured that we had access to the line in order that the wider sporting public can get an insight into this incredibly exciting event. We are already planning for Packington Park 2018!



FTCh Buccleuch Xena with Handler, the Holden family and fellow guns Judy Rainey and Allan Schofield.



(Above) Serrara Managa Sahara obliges in some style.



David Lisett with FTCh Buccleuch Xena and Shoot Manager Graham Holden.



Waiting for the result, David Lisett, John Halsted, The Duchess of Devonshire and Tina Halsted.

The Irish Kennel Club 42nd Championship Stake for any variety Spaniels sponsored by Feedwell

Illanmore on the first morning.

The beautiful Illaunmore, Lough Derg, Co. Tipperary was the venue for the 42nd Irish Kennel Clubs AV Spaniel Championship stake on Thursday 28th & Friday 29th December 2017 writes Ricky Cashin. It was held by very kind invitation of Mr. Michael Mahnke and Headkeeper Mr. Vincent Kyne. Feedwell Dog Food were once again the main sponsor this year and Mr. Jamie Clegg the Managing Director of Feedwell was present for the two days.



Winner Mr Stephan Blackwell with FTCh Luthmhor Draco holds the Joe McGrath Perpetual Cup.

Judges for this year's Championship were Mr. Willie Edgar from Co. Down and Mr. Ian Openshaw from the UK. Referee was Mr. John Keeshan from Co. Tipperary. The meet and headquarters for the Championship was the Abbey Court Hotel, Nenagh where the convoy left each morning for an 8.00 am arrival at Illaunmore shoreline.

The Championship was run entirely on the lake shoreline for the two days, cover was varying, comprising of bramble, stick piles, laid bracken, ivy bottoms, reeds and elephant grass. The show of game was incredible with an abundance of Pheasants to distract the dogs from the very tight sitting rabbits which were pushed from the most unusual places. Ground frost didn't lend itself to good scenting conditions so rabbits that were tucked in for a while proved very difficult to find except for the more seasoned campaigners.

It must be noted that the stewards of the beat Mr. Vincent Kyne and Mr. Willie White did an outstanding job over the two days who along with their team kept the game where it was needed, with each and every dog getting equal opportunity, the result of which produced a Championship of the highest quality and now has set an extremely high standard. Well done to the Illaunmore team.

The Championship stewards did an excellent job in keeping the trial flowing like a well-oiled machine. Our team of Guns were outstanding over the two days shooting really well and safely in sometimes difficult terrain.

On day one at 12.30 pm everyone in attendance was treated to



The ultimate temptation.

a fabulous lunch which was provided by the Illaunmore team, special thanks to Sally St George and Joanne Lynch. This obviously went down a treat on a cold frosty December morning, thank you ladies.

In all competing from a 40 dog entry was a total of 20 english springer spaniel bitches; 16 english springer spaniel dogs; 2 cocker spaniel dogs. The two dogs entered but did not run were: no. 32. DkFTCh Springerdale Del Gardo owned and handled by Lars Meincke, no 34 Salamere Blaze owned and handled by Tommy McCann.

The leading sire was int. Ftch skronedale romulus with 5 dogs running. Next was Int. FTCh Hollydrive Theo with 4 runners. The leading dam was FTCh Clodahill Annie with 4 dogs running.

The Championship gets underway

The trial started on a beautiful clear cold frosty morning at around 10 o'clock. First dog in on the left side under Judge Wille Edgar was no1 FTCh Clodahill Noffler of Carnteel, a dog handled by Ian Blair. He started well with a bird shot on other side, continued to hunt and was as taking a lot of ground, he had no find or retrieve.

The first even number dog down under Ian Openshaw was no 2 Mr. Norman Blakeney's FTCh Colcourt Firecrest. She meant business from the get go and was quickly into the game with multiple positive finds on rabbits and a cock pheasant which resulted in a smart retrieve to finish her run. In her second run under Willie Edgar she found a cock bird before coming into some nice ivy bottomed ground where she could show her style and pace with a nice tight pattern. She found a few birds finishing with a retrieve to complete a very nice run.

No 3 FTCh Ainninn Susie a bitch handled by Benny Ryan. This dog started well. Plenty of drive in heavy briar. She found a cock bird was steady and retrieved well. She produced another cock and remained steady always at one with her handler. Had a nice run and showed plenty of drive. (c. Eoin Howard)

She eye wiped herself in her second run and was eliminated.

No 4 Carolan's Surprise of Killyvocca handled by Ronan Gorman hunted the heavy bramble very well and had a retrieve out on the water to finish her run.

No 5 FTCh Shamar Coco a bitch handled by Murt Walsh. She found a hen and retrieved, she showed plenty of pace and power, was pulling a little, but completed her run. She completed her second run but did not feature in the awards.

No 6 Simon Dixon's FTCh Dawsonlee Heather is a lovely stylish bitch with a natural tight pattern, treated her ground very well with very little whistle from her handler. An eye wipe over the dog on the other line would finish his run. She pushed several rabbits on her second run and completed the course.

No 7 Gardenrath Picasso a cocker dog handled by Patrick Peppard was eye-wiped by Simon Dixon's Dawsonlee Heather and was eliminated. No 8 Captain Kelly's flashy bitch FTCh Sliabh Rosie unfortunately moved on a rabbit and was eliminated.

No 9 was Kilcarra Snowie a dog handled by Pat Green. A nice hard going dog, he found a hen was steady to shot and completed a nice retrieve. He produced another bird and remained steady, this would finish a nice run. He got his second run but would not feature in the awards.

No 10 PJ Davitt's Glenhestbeg Della had a good start with a find and a good retrieve out on the lake but pulled on a bit and was put out.

No 11 Sharmar Tweed a bitch owned by Mick White and handled by Kevin Murphy finished her run with a retrieve but was not called back for day two.

No 12 was Tommy McCann's Salamere Diesel, who quickly showed that he doesn't lack anything in the hunting department, a good steady flowing dog produced a bird and was efficiently retrieved off the water. That would finish his run. Diesel moved on a rabbit in his second run and was eliminated.

James Casey's bitch no 13 FTCh

Blackguard Ivy broke on a hen bird early on and was eliminated.

No 14 David Cairns' Dromore Earl was quickly into the birds with several finds along the shoreline. Earl remained at one with his handler and produced a rabbit off his nose which was not shot at. A retrieve on a loose bird would complete David's run. He moved on a rabbit in his second run and was put out.

No 15 FTCh Sliabh Cushla a bitch handled by Louis Rice. This dog started her run on a retrieve on the other side. A cock bird shot on the lake into rushes which she didn't get. Cushla seemed to lack some of her usual spark, but did finish her run with a find and a retrieve on a cock bird. Louis pulled her up in her second run.

No 16 Bronze Beau of Commonshall handled by Ronan Gorman hunted really well in heavy cover but failed on a very difficult retrieve well out on the lake.

No 17 FTCH Bess So Smart. A bitch handled by Tommy White, she started hunting light cover which seemed not to suit her. She found a hen bird which she was steady to and retrieved. She moved on a bird in her second run and was put out.

No 18 FTCh Hollydrive Abbey handled by Des Donnelly was her usual self with lots of pace and power. She completed an excellent retrieve from the lake, a find and a retrieve on a hen bird would complete her run. She found several birds and made a retrieve in her second run and would end up with a diploma of merit.

No 19 Int FTCh Hollydrive Sally a bitch handled by Mick Walsh. She started well in nice ivy bottoms. She was steady to flushed cock and made a difficult retrieve look easy. In her second run she had good finds and completed with a smart retrieve.

No 20 Barcudwen Spirit of Crispico handled by Raymond Wilson had a very nice run which included a classic find on a rabbit in an ivy bottom, sat up and watched it away back the line. A snappy find and retrieve on a pheasant would finish a nice run. For his second run he flushed a cock bird and completed a nice retrieve to finish a short run and



A nice retrieve on a hen pheasant.

(c. Colman Howard)



A Gun in position on the shoreline.

gain a diploma of merit in the championship.

No 21 Cheweky Gritsand of Glenfia a dog handled by Anthony Morris. A very stylish dog, had to hunt a heavy ditch. He did find a cock bird and a rabbit but did not have a retrieve, he got through his first run but was eliminated for passing a rabbit in his second run.

No 22 Chinachgook Dawn run of Dawsonlee handled by Simon Dixon produced a fast stylish hunting pattern. A find and a retrieve on the other line would finish her run. Her second run consisted of a beautiful find on a cock bird and retrieved to hand, a short steady run completed. She would finish with a Diploma of Merit.

No 23 Garrisoncullen Tio a bitch handled by Shane Gainley. She hunted a high bank with drive and style. She had a good retrieve on a loose hen bird, followed by a nice find on a rabbit to finish off a nice run. She had a long second run under Ian Openshaw and was going really well but eventually failed on a retrieve and was put out.

No 24 Rabby Patterson's Aine In The Pink pegged a rabbit early in her first run and was eliminated.

No 25 Glengoole rRpple handled by Roger Shore found and retrieved a hen bird and completed but was not called back.

Our Danish competitor Henrik Hansen was next in with no 26 DkFTCH Flushmore Pepper, he produced a nice pattern which enabled him to produce a tightly sitting rabbit which was shot and delivered to hand with utmost efficiently. He flushed several birds in his second run and remained steady and completed a nice retrieve to finish off and receive a diploma of merit in the championship.

No 27 Adrian Dorris' Clodahill Pele was going really well, found a wounded bird but would lose his way out on a retrieve from the other line and was eliminated. No 28 Bellelake Swannie handled by Richie Power pulled a little and moved on a rabbit and was eliminated.

No 29 FTCh Luthmhor Draco dog handled by Stephen Blackwell. This dog immediately caught the eye, full of drive style and pace. Immediately found and retrieved a rabbit. Hunting tight with a lovely pattern. Found a hen and another rabbit. Excellent run completed. He produced several birds and a rabbit along the shoreline in his second run and finished a very efficient run with a retrieve from the lake.

No 30 FTCh Clodahill Layla handled by Pat Brennan set the pace early on in her run. She hunted with a tight pattern with the pace and style that you're looking for in a championship, finished with a retrieve out on the lake. She had a nice steady run down a long by the shoreline on day two, she produced a cock bird and retrieved to hand to complete her championship and receive a Diploma of Merit. No 31 Clodahill Quiv a bitch owned by Pat Brennan and handled by Damien Kelly, this bitch had a hard act to follow after Luthmhor Draco, however this bitch did not disappoint. She found at least four rabbits was very steady and made good retrieves. A very nice run. She started her second run in a damp area near the shoreline with heavy reeds and white grass, she was quickly into the game and finished her run with several finds and a retrieve. She received a Diploma of Merit.

No 33 Sliabh Aoife handled by Louis Rice failed on a runner first dog down and was eliminated.

No 35 Paulstown Lodger handled by Paul O'Shea moved on a flushed bird and was put out.

No 36 Ardcaein Chance owned by Denis Porter and handled by Ivan Wilson started very well but unfortunately pass a tightly sitting rabbit and was eliminated.

No 37 Marketgate Dixie dog handled by Eichard Wells. This dog showed plenty of drive and style, completed a nice retrieve on a loose rabbit, a very clean run completed. He impressed immediately on day two under Ian Openshaw with some very tidy hunting and retrieved a wounded bird to hand, after several finds he completed a very good retrieve among a lot of live game to complete a good run. He would receive a diploma of merit in the championship.

Last year's winner, FTCh Lisgarvagh Jet owned and handled by Ed McAuley was next in at no 38. This strong powerful dog showed great pace from the second he was slipped. The ground opened up a little on his beat to an ivy bottom, but he would complete. He moved on his second run and was eliminated.

No 39 FTCh Palmarion Defender a dog handled by Gerry Meehan retrieved a wounded cock bird and had several finds on rabbits but pegged a rabbit that could not escape and was put out.

No 40 Spireview Dale hunted heavy cover with enormous drive but unfortunately failed on a retrieve and was eliminated.

RESULTS

The presentation of awards was held in Kennedy's Hall, Puchan Village and after some light refreshments the following results were read out:

1st and winner of The Joe McGrath Perpetual Cup Steven Blackwell's, E.S.S.D. F.T.Ch. Luthmhor Draco.

Sire: F.T.Ch. Helmsway Heath. Dam: Gannowfell Amethyst.

2nd and winner of The Parkmaple Perpetual Trophy

Mick Walsh's, E.S.S.B. Int. F.T. Ch. Hollydrive Sally.

Sire: F.T.Ch. Skronedale Romulus. Dam: Hollydrive Kylie.

Hollydrive Sally was also received the **R.McElhinney Perpetual Cup** as the highest placed Irish dog in the Championship along with The Eastern Region Army Game Club Perpetual Trophy, awarded to the breeder resident in Ireland, the produce of whose kennel is placed highest in the Championship.

3rd and winner of The Combined Spaniel Clubs' of Ireland Perpetual Trophy

Simon Dixon's, E.S.S.B. F.T. Ch. Dawsonlee Heather. Sire: Dawsonlee Faithful. Dam: Chinachgook Sulami. 4th and winner of **The Cretoka Perpetual Trophy** Norman Blakeney's, E.S.S.B. F.T. Ch. Colcourt Firecrest.

Sire: F.T.Ch. Chinachgook Roberto. Dam: Not So Little Rascal.

Diplomas of Honour

Dessie Donnelly's, E.S.S.B. F.T.Ch. Hollydrive Abbey. Sire: Int.F.T.Ch. Skronedale Romulus. Dam: Hollydrive Kylie. David Templar's, E.S.S.D.

Barcudwen Spirit of Crispico (Handled by Raymond Wilson.) Sire: Flaxdale Josh of Barcudwen. Dam: F.T.Ch. Flaxdale Hallie. Simon Dixon's E.S.S.D. F.T. Ch. Chinachgook Dawn Run of Dawsonlee. Sire: Dawsonlee Faithful. Dam: FT. Ch. Kidnais Successor. Henrik Hanson's E.S.S.D. Dk.F.T Ch. Flushmore Pepper. Sire: F.T.Ch. Buccleuch Pepper. Dam: Dk. FT. Ch. Chaser Gosfort Glow. Pat Brennan's E.S.S.B. F.T. Ch. Clodahill Layla. Sire: F.T.Ch. Skronedale Remus. Dam: FT.Ch. Clodahill Annie. Pat Brennan's E.S.S.B. Clodahill Quiv. (Handled by Damien Kelly) Sire: Clodahill Jake. Dam: FT.Ch. Clodahill Annie. Richard Wells' E.S.S.D. Marketgate Dixie. Sire: Int. FT.Ch. Hollydrive Kurt. Dam: Dawsonlee Domino

Other Awards

The Cathageinne Perpetual Trophy for best retrieve at the Championship Simon Dixon's, E.S.S.B. F.T. Ch. Dawsonlee Heather. Sire: Dawsonlee Faithful. Dam: Chinachgook Sulami. The Dermot Cahill Guns Award, which is awarded to the gun the handlers most enjoyed shooting over their dogs, was awarded to Gordan Blakeney. The Cuns Trendy which is awarded

The Guns Trophy which is awarded to the dog the guns most enjoyed shooting over:

Richard Wells' E.S.S.D. Marketgate Dixie. Sire: Int. FT.Ch. Hollydrive Kurt. Dam: Dawsonlee Domino

The Duisk Perpetual Cup awarded for the most points accumulated in field events under IKC rules during the current season (excluding 2016 Championship) up to and including the 2017 Championship:

James Casey's E.S.S.B. FT.Ch. Blackguard Ivy. Sire: FT.Ch. Hollydrive Theo. Dam: Rosbeha Arris.



(Right) Judges Ian Openshaw and Willie Edgar. (c. Colman Howard)

Feedwell, Jamie Clegg, (Sponsor) presents the top award to Stephan Blackwell Winner. (c. Colman Howard)

(Below) Guns enjoy a well earned break.





Mick Walsh gets his Second Place Award. (c. Colman Howard)



Judges Willie Edgar (I) and Ian Openshaw (r) with Referee John Keeshan (c. Colman Howard)

(Below) The Illaunmore team.



IRC



(Above) Simon Dixon took Third Place honours. (c. Colman Howard)

Norman Blakeney.

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Welcomes The Irish Kennel Club's 42nd Irish Championship for A.V. Spaniels 2017

ILLAUNMORA **Sedwell** the Irish Kennel Club AV. Spanlet Championship (A *). SHOOT

(Below) Lunchtime on the first day. (c. Colman Howard)





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Damian Newman - Maighmor (www.maighmorgundogs.com)



Damian has won the IKC Retriever Championship twice, won and been placed in trials with cockers and springers and has been a member of the winning CLA team





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The field.

EMIUM COUNTR

130

Mr Declan Boyle with INT FTCH MILLER MCDUFF wins the 51st Irish Kennel Club Retriever Championships.

As most gundog handlers will know every year the top field trial retrievers and their handlers in the country come together at an epic two day event to find the Best of the Best among the Retriever elite.

The dogs that are eligible to qualify for this event will have been on a relentless trialling campaign which stretches from January to mid-February then recommencing again in September through to the cut off in early December. By the beginning of December qualifying stakes are completed and at that point a draw is



Report by Mary Murray Main Photographs: Jan Evans, Polarstar Photography

done to decide the running order of the qualified dogs.

The purpose of field trials has always been to ensure that when bringing breeding stock forward you are choosing dogs that will hopefully pass on traits that are compatible with the work that is required of a specific breed or group of dogs. Although I am not a trialler, I am a strong advocate of preserving good working gundogs and feel the importance of preserving field trials and to a lesser degree working tests as an invaluable tool and benchmark for the future of preserving all round good working quality in gundogs.

The 51st Irish Retriever Championships was held at Shelton Abbey Shoot Co. Wicklow on December 29th and 30th 2017 by the kind permission of Mr Harry Nash and

(Below) The IKCC Judges pictured before the start.

the Shelton Syndicate and Gamekeeper Mr Philip Gregory.

Judges for this year's competition were Mr Pat Hearne (Ireland), Mr Ashley Donnan (Ireland), Mr Kevin Doughty (UK) and Mr Mike Tallamy (UK).

The shoot has long been a supporter of both Retriever and Spaniel field trials and has hosted the Championships for both categories of gundogs over the years. This would be the first time however, that Shelton would be the sole host for both days having shared it with neighbouring Ballyarthur Estate in the past.

As acreage goes Shelton is not a massively sprawling estate. The shoot has been developed within Irish forestry ground (Coillte) that surrounds the ancient Abbey. The gamekeeper and syndicate have taken full advantage of the natural landscape and currently its signature drive, known as 'The Oaks', is most likely producing some of the highest, fastest and most sporting birds in the country. Running from the boundary wall at the back of the Abbey for about two kilometres the valley rises steeply to display the most magnificent stand of mature Irish Oak trees. The impact this stand of trees makes is made all the more impressive by the wide flat spread of ground below it, of what is known as the tailings, (a legacy of the past when ore was mined here). Just to stand back and watch the magic unfold from the back of the tailings as the birds break in small controlled clusters from the very top of the majestic Oak treeline is truly one of the gratifying sights on a cold winter's day.

The 'meet' was at the shoot clubhouse before sunrise, where competitors collected their armbands, official photos were taken and then before we set off the Championship Chairman, Mr Michael Corr introduced the Judges. He thanked Mr Harry Nash, from the Syndicate (who were shooting on Day one), and gamekeeper, Philip, for all their help and support in the run up to organising this event. He welcomed Mr John Geoghan and Mr



Tealcreek Isla owned by Mr John Williamson on day 2. (Photo: Mary Murray)

Ger Foley who were representing the sponsors Connolly's Red Mills. He expressed gratitude to Red Mills for their continued support and urged everyone to support our sponsors by buying the Red Mills products. Red Mills ENGAGE is widely used by field trial competitors throughout the country. Finally wishing everybody an enjoyable two days we set off in convoy down through the abbey gates and onto the tailings for the start of the first drive.

Thirty-nine dogs had qualified. There were eight withdrawals. Four handlers had qualified two Dogs - Mr Matty Lambden with Ulverton Punch and FTCH Tamrose Argon; Mr Billy Lundy with INT FTCH The Newcam Boss and INT FTCH Drumgoose Warlord; Mr Declan Boyle with INT FTCH Miller Mc Duff and Highwalk Kerry; Mr Sean Diamond with Copperbirch Mandela and Ardnahoe Fine Design. All of the dogs qualified were Labrador Retrievers bar two. These were two Golden Retrievers, both litter mates bred by Mr Mike Hamilton - Tealcreek Isla owned and handled by Mr John Williamson and FTCH Tealcreek Aran owned and handled by Mrs Rita Corr.

The morning was bright and sunny but a yellow weather warning was in place threatening snow for later in the day. This was certainly borne out by the biting northwest wind that blew down the valley.

In the initial stages of the trial the dogs were split into odd and even numbers. This is normal practice in most trials with competitors moving from one side to the other as they move through their individual retrieves so that by the end of the first round of retrieves every dog will have been seen by all four judges.

The First Day

And so at just after 10 am the horn blew to indicate the start of the drive on the 'First Oaks.'

For the beginning of the day I followed the uneven numbered dogs with Judges Mr Pat Hearne and Mr Mike Tallamy. They lined up their sixteen charges near the back of the tailings behind the last four Guns. From this particular vantage point dogs and handlers would be treated to a full visual of the birds breaking cover from the very top of the tree line.

This is a long drive, not easy if you have a dog slightly on edge and as the drive progressed and the beating line moved along through the trees above us the birds landed in nearer and nearer. We lost one dog at this point when a hen



A view of the 1st Oaks as handlers and dogs make their way to the line-up on the first day.

bird fluttered into the brambles near the end of the line, Unfortunately 2 others were lost on the even side of the line during this drive, Not long after a winged cock bird tumbled to the ground about 70 meters out, found his legs and ran for cover. Number 3 dog Int FTCH Miller McDuff being first dog up was immediately sent by Judge Mr Pat Hearne. Handler Declan Boyle cast him straight out to the initial fall and then with a quick right cast McDuff took up the scent trail, disappeared into the thick bramble line and returned promptly with the wounded bird.

Finally the horn sounded to signal the end of the drive. I'm sure there were many in line that let go and breathed deeply as they put their leads on their dogs. Now the task of retrieving began as our teams of dedicated markers communicated with judges and one by one dogs came to the line. Two dogs were lost on our side in this round of retrieves. Both dogs worked well, entered cover when asked and hunted well but as is the nature of trialling to stay in or out of a trial, particularly in the early stages, can be as simple as turning your dog to the left or right and coming on the scent or lie of the bird.

There is one part of 'the Oaks' where the ground is free from cover. It is a wide grassy area about the size of a football pitch. It looks easy but to cast a dog from one side of it to the other after they have watched birds fall run and maybe even pick from before makes a long cast decidedly more difficult. So here a dog's ability to push through old falls would be put to the test, also the risk of picking the wrong bird if a dog should pull onto stronger scent than where you want them to go increases the further the dog goes away from you.



FTCh Watergreen Hunter owned by Mr Tom Lowry (Photo: Mary Murray)

We lost another dog here as a result of pulling onto the wrong bird at the last second.

Meanwhile word was filtering through to our side of the line that dog number 3 Int FTCH Miller McDuff had just completed his second retrieve having scaled a cliff face, up through brambles to bring back a duck from the base of a holly tree; he was certainly blazing a trail for others to follow so early in the competition.

Once the judges were happy that the ground was cleared from this particular drive, we waited for the Guns to return and followed them further down the valley to the 'Fourth Oaks'.

This drive is equally as challenging, the birds here break from the trees at a tight angle, offering more snap shooting that long visuals. It is a tighter drive, with the guns being double backed, with more cover than open area and a few cliff faces to add to the interest.

Again the field was split and dogs sat in line. It is a shorter drive and all remaining dogs remained steady until the final horn sounded.

With more cover dogs have to be allowed to work on their own more and their handlers have to trust them to do so. I felt the judges allowed ample time once the dog entered cover to hunt without putting pressure on the handlers to call up their dogs too quickly. Alas a few more dogs were lost here failing to find in some very thick unrelenting cover.

Several dogs were really impressive here: number 14 FTCH Beileys

Aguzannis of Fendawood...was sent for a retrieve where a previous dog had failed.... A cock bird had fallen about 60 meters down the track past the boundary gate of the shoot. It is an area of no man's land between Shelton and its neighbour, Ballyarthur Estate. The bird to be searched for had fallen behind a bank of laurel along a nice looking track but behind the laurel the ground falls away steeply to the river below. Handler David Latham cast his dog down the track then stopped him promptly before casting him left into the laurel and then we waited. At one point down at the bottom of the valley we could hear the flutter of wings then all again went quiet....then up out of the laurels the dog appeared carrying the wounded bird.

Quite a number of dogs impressed in this round, all being sent for retrieves from the path up through relentless bramble to find birds among the undergrowth... No.28 FTCH Tamrose Aragon, No.29 Quarrypool Charley, No.30 Tealcreek Isla, No.34 Watergreen Hunter and No.36 Lettergreen Razzle were among those catching the eye of the judges.

We worked through one more drive before light finally got the better of us and then we retired for day 1.

The Second Day

Call-backs for day 2 were:

36 Lettergreen Razzel handler Mr Sean Nolan

39 Drumgoose Oscar handler Mr Colin Montgomery

3 Int FTCH MillerMcDuff handler Mr Declan Boyle

14 Beileys Aguzannis of Fendawood handler Mr David Latham

16 Ulverton Punch handler Mr Matty Lambden

19 Int FTCH Willowmount Regal Rose handler Mr John Barr (Jnr)

23 FTCH Skerryview Alisha at Annaloughan handler Mr Peter Colville

27 FTCH Copperbirch Mandela handler Mr Sean Diamond

28 FTCH Tamrose Aragon handler Mr Matty Lambden

29 Quarrypool Charley handler Ms Ciara Behan

30 Tealcreek Isla handler Mr John

Williamson

32 Int FTCH Camgart Tomo handler Mr Gary Mc Cutcheon

33 Lassy Moonlight Sky handler Mr Alan Harper

34 FTCH Watergreen Hunter handler Mr Thomas Lowry

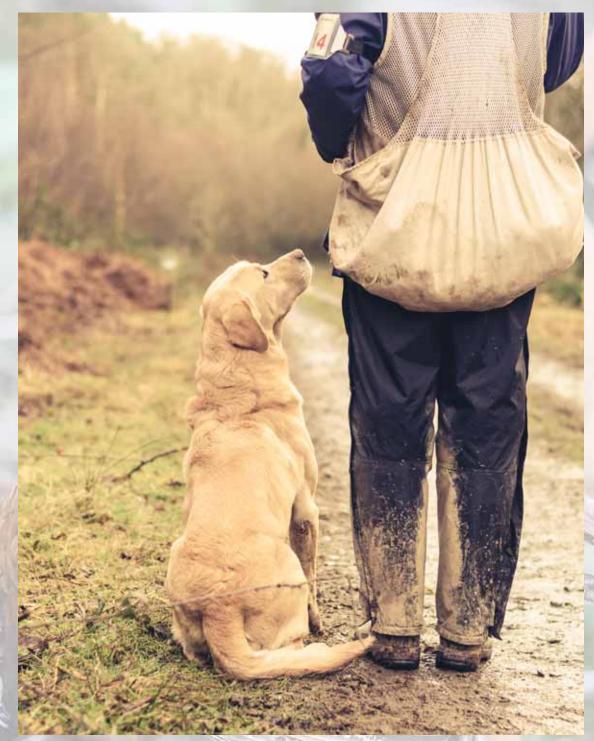
The second day saw temperatures rise considerably with the harsh north east wind dropping off. This should make scenting conditions good as warmer air along with warmer noses is generally a sweet combination something that would certainly need to come into play as the remaining dogs would be tested to the limits in regard to ability to both face and work in cover out of sight of their respective handlers.

The drives known as ' The Snuff Box ' and 'The Upper Staffords' are not for the fainthearted.

Both are relatively sheltered by a high sided valley. The Snuff box is currently in its second season as an area of felled plantation so patchy bramble growth is starting to take hold of the rough uneven ground. The 'Upper Staffords,' next door, has not yet been



Handlers in position on the second day.



FTCH Beileys Aguzannis of Fendawood owned by Ms Stefanie Latham and handled by Mr David Latham. (Photo: Mary Murray)

harvested but it being forestry ground has been left to grow wildly and unkempt for many years. There is enough light beneath the spread of conifers to have enabled more bramble and bracken to grow. The wood is cut through by a series of parallel paths and a stream.

And so as the horn sounded to indicate the start of the Snuffbox drive on the second day all eyes were on the 14 remaining dogs and handlers as they waited and watched for the birds to break cover.

The even numbered dogs here were faced with long retrieves across the wide open area of felled plantation while the uneven numbered dogs were taken to retrieve from the thicker scrubby ground where the foresters had left huge piles of broken tree branches mixed with last summer's bracken growth and of course brambles....lots of them. All of the dogs that I watched in this round of retrieves really handled the ground very well, never backed off cover and again the judges were very understanding in allowing ample time for dogs to work their way through thick cover.

We moved onto 'Upper Staffords.' It is the 'Holy Grail' test for a dog to truly face cover....

I have worked my own dogs on this ground and in this cover for over 11 years so fully appreciate every obstacle faced by all of these dogs on this day however I think when Dog number 3 was brought to the line to find a bird that three previous dogs had failed on none of us watching expected to witness what unfolded.

The bird had been marked as having fallen above the second parallel path behind the gun line in a dense; I would say almost impenetrable bed of bramble. In fact in any other circumstances you would say it was a job for a spaniel as they can get under cover when a retriever can't get through it. Between the path and where the dog would be cast from ran a stream, again overgrown with bramble and bracken on both sides....easy here to knock a dog off its original line and indeed that is what had happened three dogs previous to McDuff.

Declan Boyle cast his dog, on a line directly towards the heaviest bunch of bramble and Miller McDuff took it on. He disappeared beneath the cover and all we could see for many moments was the movement of the briar leaves as he pushed his way through. He got over the stream; still we had no visual on the dog just the movement and sound of bracken and briars being pushed aside as he made his way up the valley side. When he appeared at the upper path Declan stopped his dog and directed him into the next patch of brambles where the bird had fallen. Again we watched in trepidation as the bramble leaves moved and twitched...up, up, up he went then a moment of snuffling and the movement of cover told us all he was on his way back. There was one fraction of a second that he tried to make his way through and we all glimpsed his prize. He had the bird....Miller McDuff had shown us all in one magical moment what he was made of and that this was his time.

The final judges' huddle brought us down to 8 dogs:

3. Int FTCh Miller McDuff

14. FTCh Beileys Aguzannis of Fendawood

19. Int FTCh Willowmount Regal Rose

23. FTCh Skerryview Alisha at Annloughan

28. Tamrose Aragon

30. Tealcreek Isla

34. FTCh Watergreen Hunter

36. Lettergreen Razzel

Well done to these final eight dogs, they really were tested to the limits in the two days and showed us some fantastic dog work on very challenging ground.

After the 6th round of retrieves, these dogs were called to water to decide the placings.

In the late afternoon a full house gathered in the Shoot Clubhouse and there was an excited buzz as everyone appreciated and tucked into tables laden with sandwiches, tea, coffee and soup all very generously laid on by our host Mr. Harry Nash

Chairman Mr Michael Corr firstly stood and thanked everyone involved in the running and organising of such an event the committee, the stewards and in particular Lady Waterford, our Treasurer for her many years of service to the committee. Michael then went onto thank the Shelton syndicate who shot on day one and the six Guns who shot so well on day two. He thanked Gamekeeper Mr Philip Gregory and His wife Michelle without whose amazing support the event would not have happened. Thanks were also extended again to Mr Harry Nash. Harry offered endless help, not only during the two days but throughout the year, going above and beyond what was expected to ensure that the event ran smoothly and was enjoyed by everyone.

Thanks from our Chairman was also extended to our very generous sponsors Red Mills who supplied all competitors with goodie bags and jackets for the Judges and winning handlers. Harry Nash was invited to say a few words he said: "it was a great pleasure to host the Championships over the two days, the second day in particular providing a lot of action." Harry also thanked Robert Irwin for his help and assistance throughout the two days.

Michael then asked head Judge Mr Pat Hearne to speak. Pat opened by saying what an honour it was to judge the Championships at Shelton Abbey. To watch dogs work over very different ground over the two days and he felt, in particular that day two showed dogs performing at their best.

Michael then invited our overseas judges to speak. Mr Kevin Doughty said that he was impressed by the dogs' ability to face and work cover so well over the two days. Mr Mike Tallamy spoke of what an honour it was to be invited to judge such a prestigious event and thanked everyone for their warm hospitality and sportsmanship over the two days.

Results:

1. Int FTCH Miller Mcduff owner / handler Mr Declan Boyle

2. Lettergreen Razzel owner / handler Mr Sean Nolan

3. FTCH Beileys Aguzannis of Fendawood owner Mrs Stefanie Latham handler Mr David Latham

4. FTCH Tamrose Argon owner / handler Mr Matty Lambden

COM INT FTCH Willowmount Regal Rose owner/handler Mr John Barr Jnr

COM FTCH Skerryview Alisha at Annloughan owner / handler Mr Peter Colville

COM Tealcreek Isla owner / handler Mr John Williamson

COM FTCH Watergreen Hunter owner / handler Mr Tom Lowry

Special awards went to:

The Fred Mc Guirk Perpetual Cup for the highest placed bitch was awarded to Mr John Barr (Jnr).

The Sam Jennet Raughlin Perpetual Trophy for the breeder of the winner of the Irish Retriever Championship was presented to Mr Declan Boyle on behalf of the breeder Mr W.R.C. Haughey.

The Ballyfrema Perpetual Cup for the breeder of the highest placed Irish Bred dog/bitch in the IKC Championship was presented to Mr Declan Boyle on behalf of the breeder Mr W.R.C. Haughey

The Irish Country Sports & Country Life Magazine Perpetual Trophy for Guns Choice was awarded to Mr Declan Boyle. The magazine also sponsored a prize for the winner to keep.



All photos: Jan Evans, Polarstar Photography













Award Winners

All photos: Jan Evans, Polarstar Photography



Mr Declan Boyle with Int FTCh Miller Mcduff and Judges Mr Pat Hearne and Mike Tallamy : Winner of Irish Retriever Championship 2017.



Declan Boyle, Winner with Redmills Rep Mr Ger Foley and Mr Harry Nash, Shoot Captain.



Declan with Lillian Jennet presenting The Sam Jennet Raughlin Trophy along with Mr Harry Nash, Shoot Captain.



John Barr jnr Int FTCh Willowmount Regal Rose COM.



John Williamson Tealcreek Isla COM.



Thomas Lowry FTCh Watergreen Hunter COM.

Award Winners

All photos: Jan Evans, Polarstar Photography



Mr Matty Lambden with FTCh Tamrose Aragon 4th place.



Mr Peter Colville FTCh Skerryview Alisha at Annaloughan COM.



Mr David Latham with FTCh Beileys Aguzannis of Fendawood 3rd place being presented with his prize by Mr Harry Nash. Ger Foley Redmills rep also in photo.



Sean Nolan with Lettergreen Razzel.



Sean Nolan, (centre) with his Dog lettergreen Razzel and Judges (I) Mr Pat Hearne and (r) Mr Mike Tallamy.





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Mick Walsh with Int. F.T.Ch. Hollydrive Sally (right)

Dessie Donnelly with F.T.Ch. Hollydrive Abbey – ESSB (left)



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